Learning Report

Insights for Influence: Understanding Impact Pathways in Crisis Response

Louise Clark, Jo Carpenter and Joe Taylor

NOVEMBER 2023

Overview

The CORE programme

The Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) programme was a three-year initiative funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) that brought together 20 projects from across the global South to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery.

The research covered 42 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East to understand the ways in which the pandemic affected the most vulnerable people and regions, and deepened existing vulnerabilities. Research projects covered a broad range of themes, including macroeconomic policies for support and recovery; supporting essential economic activity and protecting informal businesses, small producers, and women workers; and promoting democratic governance to strengthen accountability, social inclusion, and civil engagement (Bolton and Georgalakis 2022).

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) provided knowledge translation (KT) support to CORE research partners to maximise the learning generated across the research portfolio and deepen engagement with governments, civil society, and the scientific community. As part of this support, the IDS KT team worked with CORE project teams to reconstruct and reflect on their impact pathways to facilitate South–South knowledge exchange on effective strategies for research impact, and share learning on how the CORE cohort has influenced policy and delivered change. This report presents an overview of these impact pathways and the lessons learnt from a selection of the projects chosen to represent the diversity of approaches to engage policymakers, civil society, and the media to generate and share evidence of the effect of the pandemic on diverse vulnerable groups.

Contents

List of acronyms and abbreviations

ARI	Arab Reform Initiative
CIPPEC	Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento)
CORE	Covid-19 Responses for Equity
CSO	civil society organisation
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GRADE	Group for the Analysis of Development (Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo)
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
ICT	information, communications, and technology
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
KT	knowledge translation
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex+
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MIDIS	Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion (Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social)
MML	Metropolitan Municipality of Lima
MNFSR	Ministry of National Food Security and Research
NASVI	National Association of Street Vendors of India
NCR	National Capital Region
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PEP	Partnership for Economic Policy
RIMISP	Latin American Center for Rural Development (Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural)
SDPI	Sustainable Development Policy Institute
TTI	Think Tank Initiative
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction to impact pathways

This report contains an overview of the following impact pathways:

1 Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP) – [Simulations and Field Experiments of Policy Responses and Interventions to Promote Inclusive Adaptation to and Recovery from the Covid–19 Crisis](#)

Use of evidence in macroeconomic policy responses and shifts in institutional practice towards evidence–based policymaking in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe.

Capacity and incentives for outreach established

Stakeholder mapping supported creation of connections

Research contextualised and positioned during design

Policy questions answered by research

Policy responses informed by direct use of evidence

Institutional practice influenced by evidence
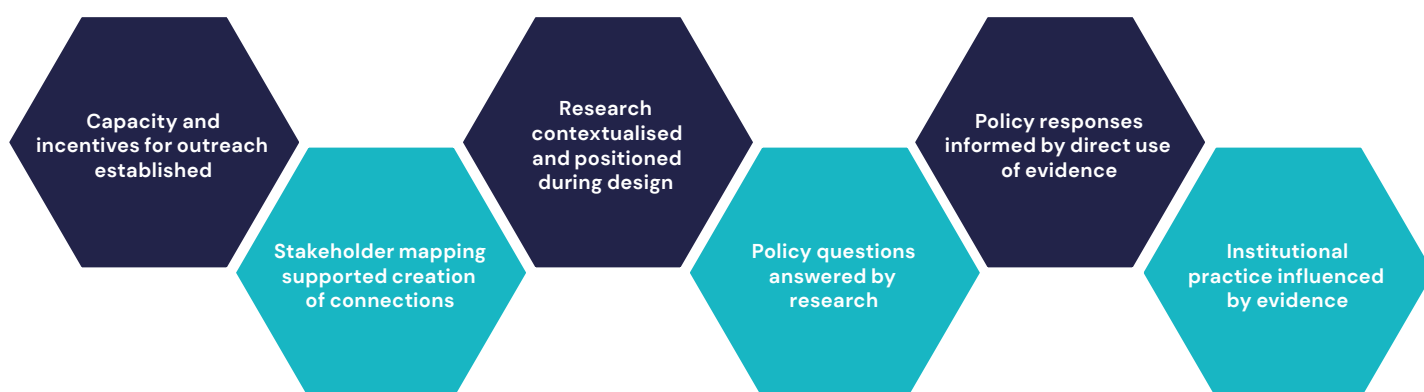
The PEP impact pathway resulted in both direct use of evidence by various government departments and shifts in institutional practice around evidence–based policymaking. In this pathway, the macroeconomic research into the impact of the pandemic (e.g. modelling) was only conducted after a series of initial activities focused on understanding the information needs of key decision makers, and the political and fiscal spaces for policy change.

2 LIRNEasia – [A New Digital Deal for an Inclusive Post–Covid–19 Social Compact: Developing Digital Strategies for Social and Economic Reconstruction](#)

Timely and targeted deployment of 'good enough' data in response to evidence gaps in policy spaces that inform responses to the pandemic.

Institutional reputation and agile communication enhanced through flexible funding

Awareness of the pandemic effects on vulnerable groups raised through rapid and user–focused research

Demand increased for evidence to understand pandemic effects and inform response

Visibility and positioning of evidence strengthened through timeliness, facilitating access to new audiences

Evidence positioned to influence emerging policy windows with key decision makers

Policy and programming influenced by evidence, supporting stronger targeting of social response

The LIRNEasia impact pathway identified a number of key causal steps, which included producing and strategically communicating timely and relevant data, identifying new policy spaces and audiences for unexpected and emerging findings, and establishing new partnerships with advocacy organisations to access these spaces and audiences.

3 Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE) – Building Back Better: Using a Disruptive Crisis to Achieve Sustainable and Gender-Inclusive Improvements in Food Security, Labour Markets and Social Protection in Latin America

Working with authorities to strengthen response and outreach to vulnerable groups.

CORE funding built on initial evidence and relationships, creating windows of opportunity for dialogue with authorities on emergency response

Research activities embedded within emergency response programmes of identified government partners

Insights to inform response and strengthen outreach to vulnerable people informed by research

Expansion of programmes and uptake across authorities informed by evidence base

Community initiatives supported by new policies, regulations, and laws

The GRADE pathway responded to an openness within government agencies to embed evidence within decision-making in the design of programmes for vulnerable groups to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on food security and employment. The pathway highlighted how research could increase the visibility of vulnerable groups, and support community responses to access additional support that could contribute to the food security and resilience of vulnerable communities.

4 Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (RIMISP) – Sowing Development: Small-Scale Agriculture and Food Security Resilient to Covid-19

Strategic alliances to diagnose challenges, strengthen dialogue, and coordinate influencing strategies.

Empirical evidence of the impact of the pandemic on food security and agri-food systems generated

Strategic local and regional partnerships identified to facilitate access to policy and decision-making spaces

Rural dialogue groups created based on social and political dynamics in areas of intervention

Research evidence aligned with priority regional issues and challenges

Research positioned to legitimise policy influence

Engagement in political debates informed by evidence

The RIMISP pathway focused on creating strategic alliances at different levels to position, validate, and adapt research. This approach enabled RIMISP to identify potential areas for policy influence based on the evidence generated. The pathway put strong emphasis on building rural dialogue groups as spaces to prioritise key issues and build strategic alliances to support policy influence working across different levels of government.

5 Asuntos del Sur – [Colabora.Lat: Towards a New Model of Governance after Covid-19](#)
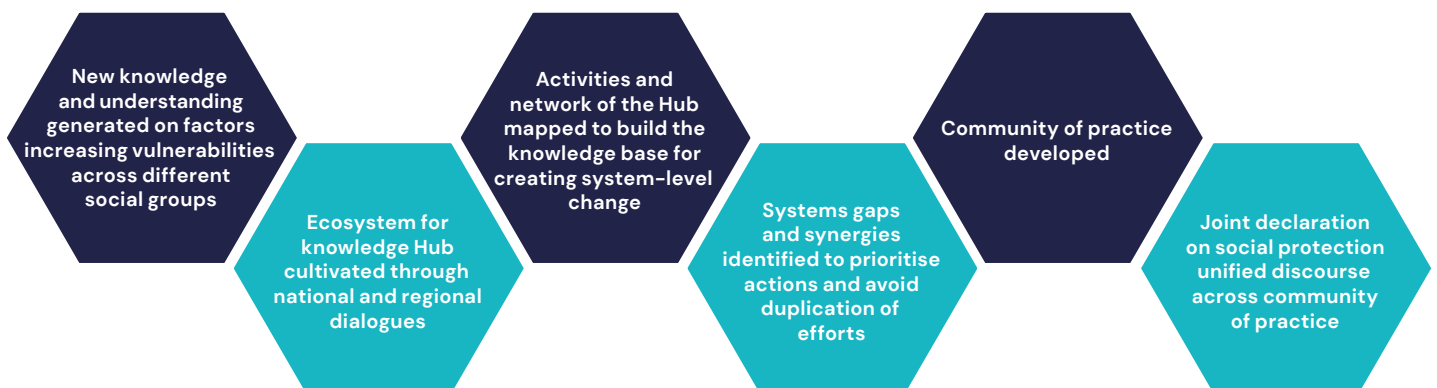
Establishing a road map for new models of democratic and collaborative governance in Latin America.

Primary research conducted into models of collaborative governance

Evidence generated on benefits of collaboration and organisational structures in pandemic response

Advocacy for collaborative governance supported by partnerships and engagement strategies

Research methodologies applied widely across new sectors and contexts

More coherent narratives on collaborative governance established at local, national, and regional levels

The Asuntos del Sur pathway created spaces for marginalised and vulnerable groups across Latin America to share their experiences of collective action and build an evidence base of the benefits of collaborative governance in support of the pandemic response. The project supported collaboration across countries to develop a series of three future scenarios that would inform policy recommendations around youth participation, regional collaboration, and vaccine distribution across the continent.

6 Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) – [Promoting Resilience in Covid-19 in MENA: Building Inclusive and Effective Social Protection and Safety Nets](#)

Building a knowledge hub in closed policy spaces to convene and coordinate a community of practice to promote more universal social protection systems in the Arab region.

New knowledge and understanding generated on factors increasing vulnerabilities across different social groups

Ecosystem for knowledge Hub cultivated through national and regional dialogues

Activities and network of the Hub mapped to build the knowledge base for creating system-level change

Systems gaps and synergies identified to prioritise actions and avoid duplication of efforts

Community of practice developed

Joint declaration on social protection unified discourse across community of practice

The ARI pathway privileged activities that supported networking and a coordinated response in attaining the desired research impact. The organisation brought together a network of academic researchers, thinktanks, activists, practitioners, and government actors working on social protection issues across several Arab countries to produce a joint declaration on social protection. In doing so, ARI brought issues of inclusion and socioeconomic rights to the centre of the debate on the pandemic response and surfaced wider implications for social welfare systems.

7 Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) – Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises, Food Security, and Evolving Social Protection Mechanisms to Deal with Covid–19 in Pakistan

Building consensus across politically polarised stakeholders and influencing policy.
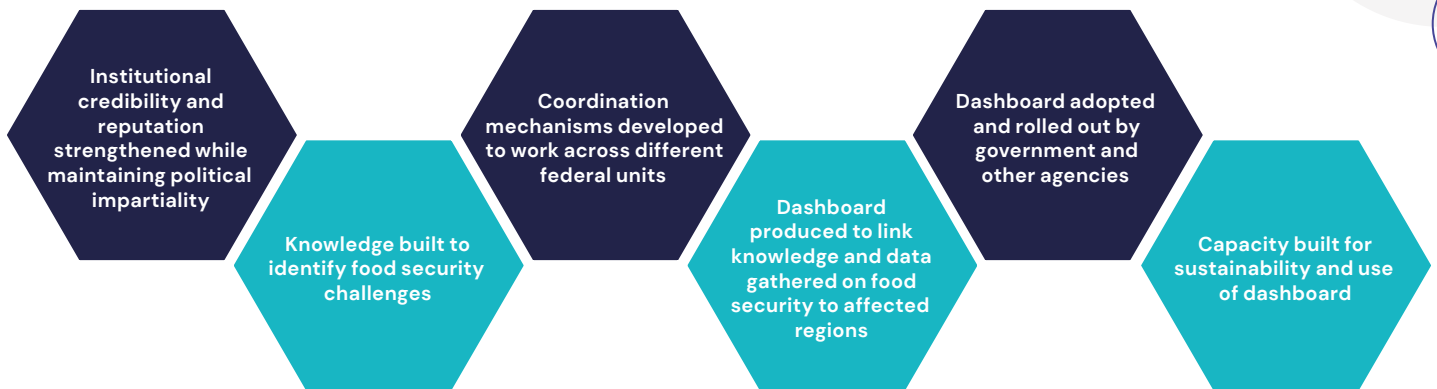
The SDPI pathway shows how building consensus across politically polarised stakeholders and influencing policy resulted in research impact. SDPI created a national coordination mechanism at sub–national level, which was vital to the adoption of the Food Security Dashboard to monitor the supply of and demand for essential food commodities.

8 International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) – REBUILD: Covid–19 and Women in the Informal Economy in Kenya, Uganda and India

Amplifying under–represented voices to share experiences and advocate for the rights and entitlements of informal workers in policy discourse.
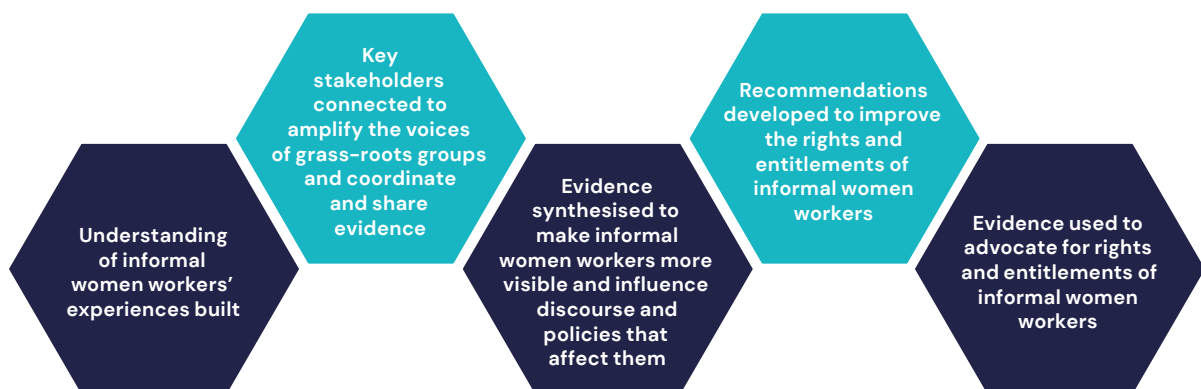
The ICRW pathway provided a space for vulnerable informal women workers to tell their stories of the effects of the pandemic on their lives and livelihoods. Insights from these stories were brought into the policy and programme planning spaces in a range of institutions including non–governmental organisations (NGOs), government agencies, and trade unions. The pathway to impact involved creating networks with grass–roots organisations, working with them to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of street vendors and domestic workers, then translating these experiences into policy recommendations.

2. Background

Impact pathway framing

Impact pathways describe the causal linkages in a development project's process of moving from activities to outputs to outcomes and impact. These often describe how a project intends to influence different stakeholders' thinking and behaviour to deliver project outcomes and impacts. Figure 2.1 provides a visual representation of how change happens in terms of the spheres of control, influence and interest, from project outputs and activities, through shifting behaviour or attitudes of key individuals or institutions, to the broader societal impact of sustained policy change.

Figure 2.1: Spheres of control, influence, and interest

Sphere of control:	Sphere of influence:	Sphere of interest:
What we do (the programme)	Who changes and how	The changes we contribute to (development impact)
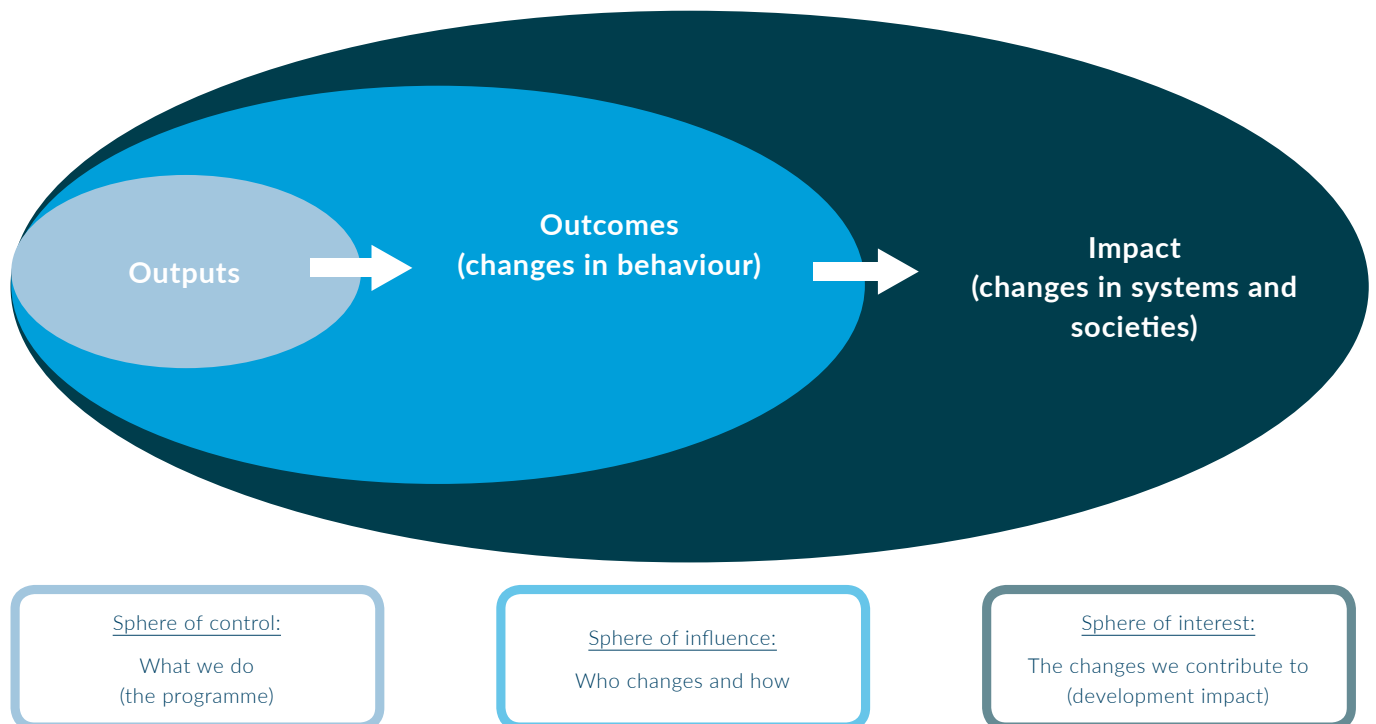
Source: Clark and Apgar (2019) (CC BY 4.0).

The expressions 'impact pathway' and 'theory of change' are often used interchangeably; for some, an impact pathway and a theory of change are one and the same thing, whereas for others, a theory of change may contain multiple 'nested' impact pathways (Clark and Apgar 2019). This latter definition is the interpretation used in this report. A well-designed project will likely have several impact pathways (Mayne 2018) that are not necessarily sequential, running in parallel and overlapping.

Project outcomes are likely to arise through changes in key stakeholders' behaviours or attitudes, with the hope that these positively interact and reinforce each other to eventually create the preconditions for broader systemic or societal changes. In practice, the lines between outcomes and impacts are contested and fuzzy, acknowledging that sustainable impact is frequently beyond the scope of a three-year research project.

It can be more illustrative to think about different types of change; for example, building capacity or strengthening networks and relationships among key stakeholder groups; informing the conceptual understanding of an issue through new debates and narratives; and the more instrumental changes of shifting policy and practice (Georgalakis and Rose 2019; Clark *et al*. 2021), which builds on a mature literature concerned with the relationship between research and policy (Oliver, Lorenc and Innvær 2014; Weiss 1979).

The impact pathway analysis in this report focuses on how research and engagement activities in the sphere of control have contributed to a range of outcomes in the sphere of influence, but does not attempt to evaluate the sustainable impact of these outcomes in the broader sphere of interest.

Methodological approach

This report is the result of a Learning Journey[1] delivered by the CORE KT team to provide a light-touch accompaniment to CORE project partners to reconstruct their impact pathways, reflecting on the different types of outcomes achieved and the causal linkages between them. This process built on a **rapid review** by IDS (Taylor *et al*. 2022), which applied the principles of outcome harvesting to explore high-level outcomes across three different research portfolios that emerged as a response to Covid-19: the IDRC CORE programme; the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) Covid Collective; and the UK Collaborative on Development Research Covid Circle initiatives.

This rapid review of documentation and technical reports aimed to cast a wide net across projects and programmes to give a snapshot of the diversity of outcomes and pathways to impact that emerged across the three research portfolios included in the study. Outcomes were then categorised using the Wheel of Impact model (Georgalakis and Rose 2019) to explore the different types of outcomes identified within the broad categories of impact: capacity, network, conceptual, and instrumental.

The CORE Learning Journey used this analysis as a starting point to identify a sample of CORE projects that demonstrated interesting outcomes and potential for deeper analysis. The KT team revisited the project proposals, outputs, and technical reports to identify the activities and outcomes described and reconstruct a preliminary impact pathway. These were used to initiate conversations with CORE project teams to gather feedback and further inputs to validate the impact pathways, and ensure that they resonated with project teams and presented a true representation of what had happened in reality. The validated impact pathways were used to promote knowledge exchange between projects in a marketplace session at the CORE global meeting in Senegal in January 2023, to facilitate cross-project learning on how different impact pathways or strategies can deliver change.

3. Trends and patterns from impact pathways

This section sets out the main trends and lessons learnt identified across the impact pathways to share these diverse experiences of how IDRC research investments delivered change in a broad range of social and political contexts against the common backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of the approaches and strategies used will have relevance and resonance for future crises and responses from research funders. These insights aim to provide a useful resource for Southern thinktanks and research institutions to develop and deliver impact pathways that engage with both civil society and decision makers in influencing policy and practice that are inclusive of vulnerable populations and responsive to the specific needs and challenges faced during intersecting crises.

The importance of organisational reputation

Many CORE grantees are well-established thinktanks and research institutions with existing brands, reputations, research portfolios, and networks. This 'institutional readiness' was often key to the impact pathways that emerged, combining high levels of expertise and research experience with established credibility with governments. Some partners referred to the Think Tank Initiative (TTI)[2] as crucial in raising their profile and positioning them as credible sources of information with key decision makers. Many CORE partners were able to leverage their reputation to access policy spaces and coordinate research that informed and evaluated responses to Covid-19 across all levels of government, from policy to operational levels.

---

[1] This work builds on a previous phase of the CORE Learning Journey, which reflected on and documented lessons learnt from the CORE programme as a rapid and responsive mechanism to the Covid-19 pandemic (Clark, Carpenter and Taylor 2022).
[2] See: **Think Tank Initiative**.

For example, GRADE responded to the emergence and uncertainty of the pandemic by applying its methodological expertise in geomapping to generate evidence of contagion effects in urban markets. This evidence led directly to coordination to support the Ministry of Finance of Peru and Metropolitan Municipality of Lima (MML) with a central government programme to deliver food supplies to marginalised urban areas. The tools and relationships developed in the early days of the pandemic provided a strong foundation to use CORE funding to further strengthen the relationship with the MML, working with the municipality in identifying and registering community kitchens across Lima. Increasing the visibility of the community kitchens facilitated access to financial and technical support, and led to their eventual legal recognition by the Ministry of Social Development and Inclusion.

In Pakistan, SDPI had a parallel experience where organisational reputation granted the institute access to policy spaces and resulted in direct uptake of its research recommendations. Credibility and a track record of consistent performance made SDPI a strong candidate to be consulted by the government and as a member of the prime minister's Economic Advisory Council. SDPI was able to introduce its research ideas directly to members of Pakistan's Cabinet. The support from the TTI from 2008 to 2018 was described as a critical enabler to build the capacity and calibre of what SDPI is today. Similarly, LIRNEasia used its credible brand and high profile to develop new partnerships, which supported the organisation to access new humanitarian and social protection policy spaces in response to unexpected emerging research findings.

Co–designing research to meet the needs of key decision makers

Other CORE projects embedded their research within decision-making spaces by working closely with policymakers to co–design research, establishing effective communication channels and building ownership of emerging findings. PEP used a stakeholder mapping exercise to identify policymakers, then established relationships and coordinated closely with decision makers in ministries, units, and task forces responsible for the Covid-19 response to formulate research questions. This ensured that research activities were framed by the questions decision-making groups were asking themselves. This approach also created a direct line of communication to these groups, so that emerging insights informed their conversations and decisions.

ICRW provides a comparable example of how a wider advisory group that included representatives from trade unions, academia, and other critical stakeholders added value to the research process by broadening connections with policymakers, and providing a strong space to take evidence from the project forwards for advocacy and policy influence. Similarly, ARI formed an advisory committee of 14 experts as a key tool for informing new and improved policies, legislation, and practice. The committee included a range of stakeholders (academics, thinktanks, NGOs, international organisations) with different areas of thematic expertise and geographic focus, providing a breadth of knowledge and experience.

Taking a critical position to raise awareness of research findings

In contrast to impact pathways that only accessed closed policy spaces and engaged with stakeholders working for the existing government, there are few examples of pathways that show the value of constructive and public criticism of government responses in supporting research impact. In Sri Lanka, LIRNEasia findings were picked up by the leader of the political opposition and used to criticise the government. The credibility and robustness of LIRNEasia's findings, alongside the compelling human interest stories it was discovering using qualitative research methods, demanded a response. ARI also had a strong media strategy, backed up by a community of practice united around a joint declaration on social protection that was critical of government pandemic responses and broader social welfare issues. In the early days of the pandemic, GRADE researchers used evidence to demonstrate how containment measures were pushing informal workers into food insecurity and highlight the lack of government systems to identify and provide for vulnerable urban populations.

Conducting participatory research with vulnerable groups to produce compelling findings

Many of the impact pathways showed the importance of using participatory or qualitative research methods to demonstrate in compelling detail the impact of certain pandemic responses. In the case of LIRNEasia, participatory approaches were combined with a media strategy that was constructively critical of the government response to highlight the pertinence of the research findings to different segments of

the population. However, other examples, such as the ICRW impact pathway, show that this was not the only route; participatory approaches were also used to identify potential policy options. ICRW gathered stories from street vendors and domestic workers, taking them directly to the organisations and institutions that had a remit or duty to protect those groups; for example, the government, NGOs, and trade unions. ICRW amplified the voices of female street vendors and domestic workers by using their life stories and personal narratives to show how they were coping with the pandemic. Conversations about the subsequent action plans developed by the women and wider networks of community organisations were then held with policymakers, NGOs, and trade unions to inform their responses.

Similarly, RIMISP created a mechanism to channel the challenges and priorities articulated by rural groups to decision-making audiences at different levels. Findings were then communicated in the national media and through ministerial roundtables on investment in rural territories, increasing the visibility of female-headed households in the pandemic response and establishing strategic alliances with regional planning bodies. RIMISP's influencing activities included facilitating dialogues and mobilising new actors in policy spaces that emerged to respond to the pandemic. In some cases, key agricultural stakeholders had been absent from these spaces. ARI was also able to capture broad perspectives though convening national and regional dialogues to cultivate an 'ecosystem' on social protection in the region that could plausibly lead to co-designing research with its intended users.

Relevance, timeliness, and using 'good enough' data

A key theme emerging across the impact pathways was how ongoing uncertainty created trade-offs between research rigour and timeliness of evidence. Despite the diversity of approaches set out in the impact pathways, and the range of contexts in which CORE partners worked, timeliness was crucial for research impact. For LIRNEasia, this meant getting 'good enough' pre-existing research data out to key audiences as quickly as possible. Facilitated by IDRC grantmaking arrangements and flexibility in budget lines, this rapid response approach extended to LIRNEasia's media and communications work, which enabled investments in targeted communications as and when important policy windows opened up.

The PEP and GRADE impact pathways demonstrate how a lack of existing evidence to inform policy responses created new opportunities for research organisations to establish and strengthen relationships. Both organisations did this by ensuring that research responded directly to the data needs of and requests from government bodies. Asuntos del Sur's work to develop its Collaborative Governance Index became a key data source for analysis of how different models of collaborative governance related to mortality rates across Latin America.

The ICRW and GRADE impact pathways focused on the importance of understanding how the pandemic affected women working in the informal economy and bringing this understanding into closed political spaces. RIMISP's influencing approach enabled the Centre to adapt its research project and make it relevant to complex governance questions involving multiple actors and drivers that were surfaced by the pandemic in Latin America.

Political contexts: opening and closing windows of opportunity

Building on the need for 'good enough' data, many of the impact pathways highlighted the critical importance of the timeliness of aligning research findings with local and national policy contexts as new policy windows and opportunities emerged. For example, LIRNEasia was able to access a completely new policy space and provide evidence to the World Bank and Food and Agriculture Organization on what weaknesses in the targeting of emergency payouts meant for the poorest groups in society. RIMISP found itself in a position of being able to influence the debate on constitutional reform in Chile. GRADE created visibility for community kitchens, which led to legal recognition of these groups and their eligibility to receive government financial support.

SDPI created a national coordination mechanism at sub-national level, which was vital to the adoption of its Food Security Dashboard. This required building consensus across stakeholders and provinces in a politically polarised country where some federal units were ruled by opposition political parties and not aligned to the central government.

In India, ICRW was working in the context of a window of opportunity created by the Indian government's openness to advisory support from international partners to inform policy on women's economic empowerment. Despite this apparent openness, there were still sensitivities to navigate for a project that promoted networking and collaboration across civil society organisations (CSOs) in a political context that is reticent about collectivisation. ICRW was clear that the impact pathway to policy influence was not straightforward and any gains made would not be attributable to its influence.

Flexibility of CORE funding to build on organisations' 'business as usual'

In many cases, the impact pathways show how CORE funding built on and scaled up existing areas of work across the cohort. The flexibility in funding was frequently cited as a key factor in enabling projects' impact pathways to evolve and respond to shifting contexts through different waves of the pandemic, climatic shocks, and the financial crisis that followed the war in Ukraine in order to navigate the effects of intersecting social, economic, political, and climatic crises on vulnerable populations.

The GRADE and SDPI impact pathways benefitted from new entry points for working with government, which resulted from increasing demand for evidence, and their own existing links with communities. The grass-roots organisations partnering with ICRW were already talking to each other and embedded within wider networks, which gave the Centre a head start in using CORE funding to convene dialogue meetings and play a knowledge-brokering role that oversaw the whole project.

The responsive funding mechanism used by the CORE programme added value to the TTI's investments. For example, SDPI retained its technical team to build and maintain its Food Security Dashboard software, which is now used by government agencies. As a result of maintaining teams and activities outside of the limits of specific projects, SDPI could build momentum at short notice without having to spend time on creating new teams. This strategy has helped SDPI to remain relevant and respond to new crises or issues as they emerge.
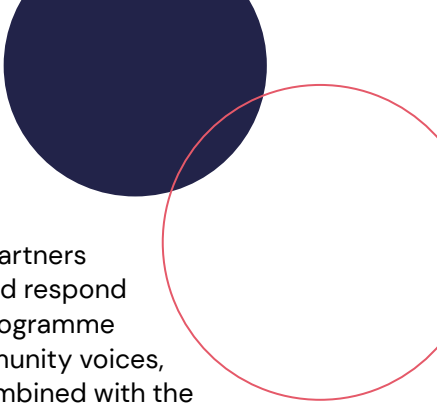
Multi-country projects

Many of the CORE investments were multi-country research initiatives within and across regions. This required strong emphasis on supporting research designs that embedded flexibility and enabled knowledge exchange and peer support across national contexts, while maintaining consistency and focus on research objectives. RIMISP's approach to rural dialogue groups provided a consistent focus to research across different countries, but there was huge variation in how this was applied across national contexts. PEP also used the same impact pathway approach in a number of different countries, based on understanding stakeholder needs and the political and fiscal spaces for policy change at country level. Work in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe saw the greatest use of research findings to inform macroeconomic policy responses to the pandemic.

In all cases, research impact relied on factors that were beyond the control of the project teams, such as the existence of relevant policy windows and opportunities. However, it is also true that in all cases the research impact was built on strong stakeholder mapping and contextual understanding of how, when, and where influence could be achieved. For Asuntos del Sur, knowledge exchange between country teams was central to the evolution of the research project and led teams to collaborate on delivering foresight planning to develop policy scenarios. This initiative identified numerous points of convergence across the region, despite differences in socio-political country contexts.

Intersecting crises and sustainability of impact

Sustainability of impact was dependent on many factors such as levels of government staff turnover, or other intersecting crises including the waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, extreme weather events, or political instability. Floods in Pakistan drew the attention of policymakers towards relief and rehabilitation efforts. This affected SDPI's work with the Ministry of Food Security; interrupting the continuity of work on the Food Security Dashboard, which needed live data on a daily basis that it was not possible to obtain in this context. However, SDPI's previous investment in developing the Food Security Dashboard and building capacity to use it meant that it would be available when emphasis shifted from rehabilitation back to business as usual. SDPI anticipated that another round of policy influencing through consultative meetings, roundtables, and policy outreach events would be needed to make the new government team aware of these instruments and tools to track food availability.

As the CORE programme reached its conclusion, the world had already moved on from Covid-19 and lived through the global financial crisis following the war in Ukraine. In many country contexts, other social, political, or climatic crises emerged. CORE projects had already evolved to adapt and apply the methodologies and evidence generated to explore solutions to their constantly evolving realities. CORE partners moved onto new projects and funding cycles in their work to address vulnerability, and respond to existing and emerging crises and challenges, building on the legacy of the CORE programme and its strong emphasis on building national research capacities, engaging with community voices, and embedding evidence into policy conversations. The flexibility of IDRC funding combined with the emphasis placed on strengthening Southern thinktanks and research institutions have ensured that the impact pathways presented in this report will continue to evolve.

4. Impact pathways

4.1 PEP – Use of evidence in macroeconomic policy responses and shifts in institutional practice towards evidence–based policymaking

Research project: Simulations and Field Experiments of Policy Responses and Interventions to Promote Inclusive Adaptation to and Recovery from the Covid–19 Crisis.

Project profile

PEP is a global organisation that fosters local development solutions in the global South by supporting locally based researchers to fill critical evidence gaps, building links with policymakers, and providing a global platform to promote research findings. The PEP research grant supported projects in Africa, Asia, and South America. The impact pathway focused on work in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe.

The PEP country research sought to inform appropriate and inclusive adaptation and recovery policies, equipping local decision makers with the tools and capacity to develop processes and systems that supported evidence–informed policymaking. PEP planned to lead a cross-country analysis of its results to identify general lessons that could guide inclusive response and recovery policies in other countries. The PEP country research used computable general equilibrium models, combining economic theory with real economic data to model the impact of shocks and policies. Country research teams used this economic modelling tool to explore the likely impact of policy responses to the pandemic. Research teams led by locally based researchers and individuals from key government bodies co–produced the country research.

Impact pathway

PEP's impact pathway identified two main impacts achieved: firstly, direct uptake or use of evidence; and secondly, shifts in institutional practice. The PEP impact pathway revealed that the actual research (e.g. the economic simulation modelling tool) was only conducted after a number of initial activities had been completed. These activities focused on understanding who the key decision makers were, what evidence or data they needed, and the political and fiscal spaces for policy change. This contextual information informed the design of the research, enabling country research teams to identify specific policy questions for the research to answer, and to adapt or modify the data fed into the economic simulation model.

The project benefitted from the involvement of policy outreach mentors that PEP assigned to each country research, and from contracting arrangements that encouraged early work on stakeholder mapping and consultation. In the most successful projects (i.e. Nigeria, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe), the research agenda and questions were informed by stakeholders from government agencies and wider civil society. Using snowball interview methods to widen the consultation, the country research teams increased their networks and influencing capacity.

Impact pathway 1: Use of evidence in macroeconomic policy responses and shifts in institutional practice towards evidence-based policymaking in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe

Capacity and incentives for outreach established

Stakeholder mapping supported creation of connections

Research contextualised and positioned during design

Policy questions answered by research

Policy responses informed by direct use of evidence

Institutional practice influenced by evidence

PEP identified partner research organisations with experience of engaging with government

Researchers and mentors conducted stakeholder mapping to identify key people and institutions to engage with during research cycle

Ongoing discussion within research team to ensure research responds to contextualised evidence needs and political and fiscal space for policy change

Research team adapted PEP modelling tool to country context and established clear policy questions for research to answer

Pakistan's Planning Commission used macroeconomic simulations produced by research to inform 2021/22 federal budget

Pakistan's Ministry of Planning commissioned training from research team on strengthening institutional capacity to develop evidence-informed policy

Outreach activities incentivised in contracting arrangements

Researchers and mentors developed outreach plan based on upcoming events and other engagement opportunities

Research team built links with well-placed and motivated elected representatives and civil service officials with power to make policy decisions

Research conducted using adapted economic modelling tools to explore impact of pandemic and related policy responses

Government of Nigeria established emergency cash transfer programme to alleviate poverty and used modelling to inform fiscal decision-making

Nigerian Presidency directed government agencies to use matrix developed by research as basis for national social accounting

Researchers paired with experienced policy outreach mentors

Key individuals identified by stakeholder mapping were consulted, resulting in some joining the research team

Research produced clear policy recommendations, taking into account fiscal and political space for policy change

Covid-19 Task Force in Zimbabwe presented research recommendations to Cabinet

Head of the Covid-19 Task Force stated research findings were being used to 'fine-tune strategies for implementation of response to pandemic'

Source: Authors' own.

Activities – Sphere of control

The successful PEP country projects adapted the PEP modelling tools to their countries' contexts and gender realities. In Pakistan, the research team put greater emphasis on the labour market and agricultural sector to better capture the disproportionate impact of the pandemic response on women. The team included an additional scenario of capital subsidy policy for the agricultural sectors, with a sub-sectoral emphasis on the smallholder farming sector, which is dominated by women. This ensured the economic simulations produced policy recommendations that supported inclusion.

Similarly, in Zimbabwe a gender consultant reviewed the PEP tool to ensure the simulations reflected gender disparities in the country. These adaptations of a generic economic modelling tool to country-specific realities ran alongside stakeholder mappings and consultations with identified stakeholders to ensure the model produced useful and relevant information to support inclusive policy responses.

Outcomes – Sphere of influence

The outcomes identified in the impact pathway show the key causal steps towards the impact that the PEP project achieved. These were similar in each of the successful country projects reviewed.

In Nigeria, a research team member sat on the Economic Sustainability Committee created by the president. This meant that policy questions surfaced in these meetings could feed directly into the research agenda; and, conversely, that research findings could feed directly into policy debates happening at the heart of government (or at the heart of the government's response). In August 2022, the research team used its connections to organise a national policy conference to publicise its findings, hosted by the Office of the Chief Economic Advisor to the President.

The relationships built with the various government bodies responsible for the pandemic response led to changing institutional practice in relation to evidence-informed policymaking. Key examples are the presidency requiring government agencies to use PEP's social accounting matrix as the basis for a national social accounting matrix. The chief economic advisor to the president requested that the PEP economic modelling tool – the computable general equilibrium model – be used to address other national policy priorities beyond pandemic response.

Discussion of research findings by the Economic Sustainability Committee contributed to the Nigerian government's decision to distribute emergency funds through a rapid response cash transfer project to alleviate poverty. The research also contributed to policy changes that responded not only to the pandemic but also to the economic crisis that followed. The government reduced dependence on oil exports to finance the national budget and earmarked funds to buy vaccines.

In Pakistan, researchers established relationships and met regularly throughout the research cycle with the Government of Pakistan's Planning Commission, the Federal Board of Revenue, the Bureau of Statistics, and the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. A representative from the ministry joined the research team and was pivotal to the project informing policy in a timely manner.

Planning Commission officials requested additional disaggregated data on consumption impacts from the research team to support their assessment of the government's fiscal response to the pandemic. The Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives commissioned training from the research team to strengthen institutional capacity for evidence-based policy design and evaluation. The Bureau of Statistics announced that it would improve its approach to collecting gender data.

At a later stage of the research cycle the research team was invited to discuss its findings with the Office of the Prime Minister, and collaborated with the Ministry of Commerce. The Planning Commission used the economic simulations to inform the federal budget for 2021/22. The research contributed to policy adjustments that supported more inclusive responses, including the Federal Board of Revenue revisiting the design of indirect taxes, a targeted subsidy programme for agriculture and a farmer support card. Trade taxes and tariffs at import stage were rationalised, and tariffs on agricultural inputs and intermediate goods were further reduced to enhance industrial competitiveness. The Federal Board of Revenue rationalised the general sales tax on large-scale manufacturing, prioritising agriculture and food items.

In Zimbabwe, the research team collaborated with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. It also met with the minister who had been appointed chair of the national Covid-19 Task Force, and the Director of Economic Development Affairs in the Office of the President and Cabinet. The research found the government policy response to be effective in increasing production and investment, and ensuring gender equity. Findings were shared with the Cabinet through the Covid-19 Task Force and the research team organised a national policy conference for representatives of key government institutions. The head of the task force publicly stated that they would be using the findings to fine-tune strategies for implementation of the response to the pandemic.

The strong links built with key ministries, units, and task forces responsible for the Covid-19 response were a crucial outcome for successful PEP country research projects. Lack of available data to guide policy responses provided a new opportunity for research organisations to influence policy, often enabling them to respond to direct requests for data from government bodies.

Final reflections

Changes to institutional practice in the use of evidence to support policy formulation and evaluation, and increased capacity for evidence-informed policymaking are designed to support the sustainability of research impact. Requests for training and the requirements set out by various government agencies for the longer-term use of PEP tools and approaches, in addition to the relationships built with key government bodies and ministries, mean that it is plausible that the research impact will be sustained. Sustainability of impact is dependent on many factors that are not in the control of the research team, such as levels of government staff turnover and political (in)stability.

PEP reflected that the most successful country projects were those that ensured key stakeholders fed into research design and agendas. However, sometimes time pressure to start work meant that research teams had already set agendas before stakeholder consultations had taken place. The level and quality of stakeholders' participation was key to the impact of the research. Engagement with a wide group of stakeholders also increased the researchers' influence.

Questions remain about the extent to which the content of the research findings affected the way they were taken up by government decision makers. In the case of Zimbabwe, the research was not critical of the government's pandemic response, finding it fit for purpose and recommending only minor tweaks. In Pakistan, close relationships between the research teams and government partners meant that findings were already closely linked to government agendas. It is not clear from the impact pathway whether more radical solutions and recommendations, if appropriate, would have been picked up in the same way.

On reflection, PEP concluded that government buy-in added huge value and clearly outlined the demand for evidence and the importance of research rigour to deliver objective evidence on the programmes and policies studied. However, it is possible that research impact pathways that develop close relationships with government policymakers could find themselves co-opted into government agendas.

This reflection relates to wider questions about how knowledge is generated, legitimised and put to use, in or outside the existing political and economic system. In Nigeria and Pakistan, influential individuals in different government agencies and bodies incentivised the use of PEP models through public statements and training. However, no information is currently available on the extent to which PEP models are currently in use because of this.

PROJECT DETAILS

Timeline
August 2020–September 2023

Budget
CA$1,202,800

Geographical focus
Global project conducting economic modelling simulations in Argentina, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe

Other CORE outputs related to this project
Ahmed, S.; Ahmed, V.; Alain, M. and Gatellier, K. (2022) *Improving the Fiscal Policy Response to Covid-19 in Pakistan*, Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Stories of Change, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2022.003

Mabugu, R.E.; Maisonnave, H.; Henseler, M.; Chitiga-Mabugu, M. and Makochekanwa, A. (2023) 'Co-Modelling for Relief and Recovery from the Covid-19 Crisis in Zimbabwe', *IDS Bulletin* 54.2: 41–58, DOI: 10.19088/1968-2023.131

4.2 LIRNEasia – Timely and targeted deployment of 'good enough' data in response to evidence gaps in policy spaces that inform responses to the pandemic

Research project: [A New Digital Deal for an Inclusive Post–Covid–19 Social Compact: Developing Digital Strategies for Social and Economic Reconstruction](#).

Project profile

LIRNEasia was founded in Sri Lanka in 2004 and currently has 15 staff in its Colombo office, around 30 external international researchers and consultants, plus an extended network across the Asia–Pacific region. LIRNEasia defines itself as a pro-poor, pro-market thinktank that supports decentralised innovation, including through competitive markets, to enhance the lives of poor people. The organisation conducts in–depth, policy–relevant research on infrastructure industries, including information, communications, and technology (ICT) sectors. When appropriate, its work extends to sectors that can benefit the poorest citizens in the region.

LIRNEasia's CORE research project was part of the Research ICT Africa–led consortium, which aimed to study the linkages between the informal economy and the digital transformation of governance, and inform policy debates on the role of digitalisation in the management of disasters and pandemics, and reconstruction of emerging economies. The consortium conducted research in South Asia, Latin America and Africa, but this impact pathway focuses on work in Sri Lanka only.

In Sri Lanka, LIRNEasia first focused on the impact of Covid–19 lockdowns on vulnerable citizens by studying online service delivery experiences relating to access to goods, education, work, cash, and health care. As many other countries entered the recovery phase following the Covid–19 crisis, Sri Lanka plummeted into an economic crisis, driven by decades of public finance mismanagement.

As fuel became scarce and people were again confined to their homes, LIRNEasia's research on online education and work became relevant once more, but with additional hurdles such as lack of access to electricity. Inflation soared, reaching a peak of 73 per cent in November 2022, and the need for social safety nets increased. A policy window for large-scale reform of social safety nets also opened, as it was seen as a key part of Sri Lanka's reform agenda before it would be eligible to receive a bailout from the International Monetary Fund. Therefore, LIRNEasia began undertaking further research on improving targeting and delivery of social assistance.

LIRNEasia's research strategy included conducting nationally representative surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Additionally, the team used less traditional methods such as e-diary tools to get detailed qualitative insights from people living in lockdowns, and analysed transaction–generated big data sets from electricity providers to assess the suitability of selection criteria for social safety nets.

Impact pathway

LIRNEasia's impact pathway identifies key outcomes that were necessary causal steps towards the impact that the research achieved. The organisation was already positioned as a respected 'brand' that was well known in political and policy circles when the pandemic occurred. Project funds supported ongoing investment in institutional profile-raising activities, to build researchers' communications capacity, and fund targeted research communications. This supported the production and strategic communication of timely and relevant data; the identification of new policy opportunities, spaces, and audiences as the research adapted to the evolving context of the pandemic and the economic crisis; and the establishment of new partnerships to gain access to these spaces and audiences.

Impact pathway 2: Timely and targeted deployment of 'good enough' data in response to evidence gaps in policy spaces that inform responses to the pandemic

Institutional reputation and agile communication enhanced through flexible funding

Awareness of the pandemic effects on vulnerable groups raised through rapid and user-focused research

Demand increased for evidence to understand pandemic effects and inform response

Visibility and positioning of evidence strengthened through timeliness, facilitating access to new audiences

Evidence positioned to influence emerging policy windows with key decision makers

Policy and programming influenced by evidence, supporting stronger targeting of social response

Long-term investment in institutional profile raising and communication skills of early- to mid-career researchers

Multidisciplinary research approach increased research relevance to broader challenges that impacted on digital policy

Highly targeted communication of timely and 'good enough' data to key stakeholders

LIRNEasia was only organisation in possession of robust, clear, and timely data on the failure of targeted social welfare programmes

LIRNEasia's research on improving targeting and delivery of social assistance picked up by key actors in social protection including government, development agencies and thinktanks, and media

Social safety net reform in Sri Lanka, through evidence-based targeting and streamlined delivery channels

Investment in communications included a rapid-response mechanism to mobilise communications as policy windows emerged

User-centric research design built knowledge of on-the-ground realities and experiences of vulnerable groups during lockdown (access to cash, services, food, and technology)

Opposition leader amplified public message of weak government pandemic response

New partnerships with organisations working on challenges reflected in emerging survey data and qualitative research provided greater visibility and access to new audiences

LIRNEasia researcher joined World Bank team developing National Social Protection Policy for Sri Lanka

Delivery of education through non-digital channels and changes to ICT policy suggest research impacted both education and ICT policy

Rapid re-analysis and communication of existing data (2018 household survey) raised awareness among policymakers of likely impact of pandemic and most vulnerable groups

New 2021 survey commissioned on access to cash, services and technology, with new questions reflecting the evolving context (high inflation, debt default, and shortages)

Clear policy recommendations produced on access to remote education picked up by the Education Forum for Sri Lanka with strong links to Ministry of Education

Source: Authors' own.

Activities – Sphere of control

The research team focused on getting 'good enough' research data to key audiences as quickly as possible. The weakness of the government's pandemic response, and the lack of data available to support an effective and inclusive response, created an opportunity for LIRNEasia to reuse existing household survey data. The organisation analysed its 2018 survey data to extrapolate the likely impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups and communicated strong, evidence-based policy messages publicly through opinion pieces in broadsheets and social media content tagged to key ministries.

To understand the lived experiences of those living in lockdowns, in mid-2020 LIRNEasia undertook qualitative e-diary research into the experiences of men and women from different socioeconomic classes living in a district of Western Province where severe lockdowns had been imposed. LIRNEasia conducted regular monitoring of data uploaded to a shared computer drive and made WhatsApp calls to respondents to triangulate data, identify knowledge gaps, and adapt question sets to gather missing information. The organisation followed this up in 2021 with a 2,500-sample, nationally representative household survey covering 25 districts, responding to the new and evolving context, and examining the role of digital tools and channels in service delivery in Sri Lanka, including education and work.

The qualitative research produced powerful stories about the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable people, while the quantitative survey provided robust evidence of suffering and government failure that was hard to ignore. For example, the survey found that 55 per cent of the poorest people did not receive social assistance. LIRNEasia's research also showed in compelling detail how online education provision was inadequate and highly dependent on parents' or carers' skills, household access to technology, and the quality of school enrolment records. During lockdowns, many services had to be accessed online. The research also identified other challenges citizens faced (e.g. accessing cash from bank accounts in an emergency and placing food orders online).

LIRNEasia identified that a policy window for contributing to social safety net reform had opened, and undertook further research to fill knowledge gaps. Therefore, the organisation undertook another survey (drawing on a nationally representative 10,000-sample survey across 25 districts) to assess the effectiveness of current policies in identifying those in need. As the potential for using electricity as an indicator of need began to be discussed in policy circles, LIRNEasia also began analysing transaction-generated data from an electricity provider, in combination with data from a 2,500-sample survey to understand the suitability of the indicator. Qualitative research in the form of focus group discussions and key informant interviews was conducted in 12 districts with over 100 respondents to understand chokepoints in registering for and obtaining social assistance.

Outcomes – Sphere of influence

LIRNEasia used its robust, persuasive, timely, and highly relevant research data to influence policymakers, with strong, public-facing policy messages about how to improve the weak government pandemic response. The organisation used its credible brand and in-depth knowledge of research stakeholders' ways of working to effectively communicate these targeted policy messages.

LIRNEasia's influence is shown by the different meetings and forums that it was invited to attend, and the new partnerships it was able to establish. The organisation's chair and CEO attended three International Monetary Fund consultations with thinktanks on reform priorities. The senior research manager was interviewed on prime-time television as the country's economy collapsed.

Partnerships with the Sri Lanka Education Forum and the Advocata Institute supported the use of research to influence government education policies, and political debates around the need for a more efficient, effective social protection system. At a research launch event, the director of the national ICT regulator drew on LIRNEasia research to publicly highlight the paradoxical policy decisions and tax structures in Sri Lanka that inhibited inclusive digital strategies.

Later, as a result of its expanding partnerships, and informed by research findings, LIRNEasia began working more collaboratively with the United Nations (UN) and development agencies, ultimately adapting the findings of its 2021 survey to specific requests from select players in the provision of social protection and humanitarian cash assistance.

By accessing and responding to the needs of policy spaces and the individuals and teams responsible for policy decisions and processes, LIRNEasia directly contributed to social assistance providers' operational decisions, and influenced government education and ICT policies. In line with the organisations' recommendations, the government proposed to deliver social assistance through bank accounts.

Subsequently, LIRNEasia's senior research manager worked as part of a World Bank team to develop Sri Lanka's National Social Protection Policy. The 10,000-sample survey and the qualitative research from across 12 districts were used to highlight chokepoints in social assistance registration and delivery processes, and whether the selection criteria the government was using allowed social assistance to reach intended beneficiaries.

The research aimed to improve outreach and communications strategies, and further engage government and key stakeholders. In this way, LIRNEasia contributed to improving social safety nets in Sri Lanka. The delivery of education through non-digital channels during the pandemic suggests that the organisation's research influenced the direction of education policy. Although LIRNEasia cannot prove that government actions regarding new education or social assistance policies were the result of CORE research, the research findings were highly relevant to changes made.

Final reflections

The growing influence that LIRNEasia's research had on the work of government and development agencies was demonstrated by requests from these agencies for further data from LIRNEasia to support improvements in the social safety net programme. The sustainability of the research's impact on policy remains to be seen, not least because it depends on many factors that are beyond LIRNEasia's control (e.g. political and fiscal factors). However, as a well-positioned, high-profile organisation that has a demonstrated ability to rapidly produce useful data, it is highly plausible that the organisation will continue to have an impact on policy in these areas.

The extent to which public debate and discussion of LIRNEasia's research put pressure on the government to respond to the research findings remains unclear. However, a key factor was a leader of the opposition giving voice to the research findings and using LIRNEasia data to highlight government failure to increase the legitimacy of the message in the Sri Lankan political context. LIRNEasia's investment in targeted media strategies was vitally important; the same impact could not have been achieved through closed meetings, invited spaces for policymakers or policy briefs, although these were important, too.

The rapidity with which LIRNEasia produced credible policy messages based on 'good enough' research data, rather than waiting for research to be finalised, was also very important. LIRNEasia's rapid response extended to its media and communications work, with the structure of the IDRC grant enabling the organisation to put out targeted communications linked to key policy windows and events, and to use public relations companies to identify and reach out to journalists.

PROJECT DETAILS

Timeline
July 2020–August 2023

Budget
CA$1,668,100

Geographical focus
Global project with six focus countries – Colombia, India, Nigeria, Peru, South Africa, and Sri Lanka

Other CORE outputs related to this project
Galpaya, H.; Hurulle, G. and Gunawardana, D. (2023) '**Policy Influence in Crisis: Reflections from a Southern Thinktank**', *IDS Bulletin* 54.2: 75–92, DOI: **10.19088/1968-2023.133**

4.3 GRADE – Working with authorities to strengthen response and outreach to vulnerable groups

Research project: [Building Back Better: Using a Disruptive Crisis to Achieve Sustainable and Gender–Inclusive Improvements in Food Security, Labour Markets and Social Protection in Latin America](#).

Project profile

GRADE is a private research centre that aims to deliver applied research to stimulate and enrich the debate, design, and implementation of public policy in Peru and across Latin America. The research grant supported GRADE to work with diverse research, civil society, and government partners through two key workstreams: food systems and food security in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, and labour market and social protection in Peru, Argentina, Ecuador and Colombia, in both cases with a strong gender perspective. In addition, the grant covered work with Southern Voice, a network of Southern thinktanks, to promote Southern leadership in global policy debates. This section presents an impact pathway that outlines work on food security in Peru, and initiatives to support labour market insertion in Peru and Argentina.

The food systems component of the project had two main objectives: to develop tools to reduce the risk of local food markets spreading Covid–19 and improve the efficiency of their internal processes; and to find novel ways of getting food supplies to vulnerable groups. The labour markets objective aimed to generate evidence to increase female labour market insertion and better job conditions, leading to women's empowerment.

Impact pathway

GRADE's research delivered impacts in the policy sphere by generating evidence that informed a series of legal reforms and policies to enable the identification, registration, and financing of community kitchens (known in Spanish as *ollas comunes* – 'community pots') as a mechanism to support the food security of vulnerable people. The research increased the visibility of community kitchens, and facilitated access to government finance and technical support, which undoubtedly contributed to the food security of hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people.

Research into labour markets contributed to new understanding of the process of designing and delivering online training for vulnerable women that developed their soft skills and increased their employment opportunities. In both Argentina and Peru, research teams worked closely with government authorities in designing and adjusting evaluative activities that enhanced the ownership and, in the case of the Municipal Government of Buenos Aires, use of evidence to inform future programmes. In Peru, the opportunities for policy influence and sustainability of impacts in both workstreams were restricted by political turbulence and rapid turnover of administrations, which have continued to intensify and are in themselves a new phase of crisis.

Impact pathway 3: Working with authorities to strengthen response and outreach to vulnerable groups

CORE funding built on initial evidence and relationships, creating windows of opportunity for dialogue with authorities on emergency response

Research activities embedded within emergency response programmes of identified government partners

Insights to inform response and strengthen outreach to vulnerable people informed by research

Expansion of programmes and uptake across authorities informed by evidence base

Community initiatives supported by new policies, regulations, and laws

GRADE work mapping market contagion hazard generated evidence of lack of sanitary measures and equipment, informing work with Ministry of Defence and MML to deliver food to vulnerable groups

Ministry of Production considered e-commerce platform and digital wallets within Innova tu Mercado (Innovate your Market) programme to support recovery of traditional food markets and food security

MIDIS regulation recognised community kitchens as social organisations and created financial support mechanisms

Promotion of e-commerce platform and introduction of food market digital wallets in response to Ministry of Finance incentive scheme to support market controls

Experience informed design of Hambre Cero (Zero Hunger) pilot with MIDIS to deliver food through community kitchens (in 7 districts of Lima and other cities)

Food systems and food security

Municipal law approved MML protocol to deliver technical support, creating potential model for replica with other municipalities at district level

Legal recognition of community kitchens promoted initiative to deliver sustainability and finance, and increase productivity

Collaboration with MML to develop a protocol for self-registration of 'ollas comunes' – 3,000 community kitchens registered in 3 months

Congress supported MIDIS to work with community kitchens as mechanism for food distribution and approved provision of food and gas vouchers to dynamise local markets

Labour market and social protection

Research delivered insights into cost–benefit and design of training for vulnerable women in crisis contexts (e.g. attrition rates, incentives, timetables, focus of modules)

Collaboration with Ministry of Employment to evaluate Trabaja Perú (Peru Works) programme to improve employment opportunities and impact on inclusion

Strong technical capacity within Ministry of Employment supported dialogue around study and strong ownership, and engagement with evaluation process and results

Pandemic context required trade-off in rigour, but evidence generated from small sample size was extremely useful

Research focus adapted as pandemic intensified and response was limited to virtual training

Municipal Govt BsAs used evidence to consider how to work on care and explored opportunity for future collaboration with CIPPEC

Research delivered evidence of positive results in empowerment, but limited effects on inclusion

CIPPEC designed programme in Argentina in collaboration with Municipal Govt BsAs and secretary of gender equality

CIPPEC:
Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth

MIDIS:
Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion

MML:
Metropolitan Municipality of Lima

Municipal Govt BsAs:
Municipal Government of Buenos Aires

Source: Authors' own.

Activities – Sphere of control

Key research activities relevant to this grant were delivered prior to IDRC funding and provided an important foundation for the impact pathways GRADE and its partners pursued. As lockdown measures were imposed across Peru, the GRADE researchers responded to the rapidly changing context by trying to understand how containment measures were pushing informal workers into food insecurity, and highlighted the lack of government systems to identify and provide for vulnerable urban populations.

This self-funded research led to a collaboration with the Ministry of Defence and the Metropolitan Municipality of Lima (MML) to support their programme to target vulnerable people with door-to-door Covid-19 testing and food supplies. In addition, GRADE's expertise in geomapping provided a mechanism to generate evidence of the contagion hazards of market overcrowding, and the lack of controls and sanitation measures in food markets that were also creating threats to food security. This led to collaboration with a Ministry of Finance scheme to incentivise food market controls.

CORE funding was critical to continue to develop these research agendas and consolidate relationships with government authorities.

A central component of the CORE-funded research was to enhance the visibility of the community kitchens, which were acting as informal mechanisms to address food insecurity among urban communities. As informal entities, there were no mechanisms through which these community kitchens could receive funding from the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion (MIDIS); building on its previous work with the government, GRADE turned to the MML and then MIDIS to develop a protocol that enabled self-registration of such initiatives. Technical assistance on nutrition, management, and health practices was also made, developed, and delivered through the project.

Work to deliver the labour market and social protection workstream involved close coordination with the Ministry of Employment's Trabaja Perú (Peru Works) programme, in Peru, and with the Municipal Government of Buenos Aires and its partner the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC), in Argentina, on programmes that sought to increase women's employability and economic empowerment.

Training modules needed to be adjusted to the reality of the pandemic with virtual (synchronous and asynchronous) sessions on digital and soft skills. In Peru, training modules were delivered by the ministry training team. Monetary incentives were offered as a reward for completing the training. Participants were randomly selected and assigned to treatment and control groups to conduct a rigorous impact evaluation study with groups of 200–300 women, applying a baseline and a follow-up survey three months after the intervention.

Outcomes – Sphere of influence

Food systems and food security

Work on food security in Peru generated empirical evidence that directly contributed to developing protocols to support the effective operation and management of the community kitchens. This evidence also informed the regulatory frameworks that supported the registration and recognition of community kitchens as social organisations, giving them legitimacy and making them eligible to receive financial assistance. The applied and action-oriented focus of this research delivered insights into the effects of the pandemic on the most vulnerable people and changing patterns of food consumption. The strategy of working with the MML to deliver this research was key to raising the political profile of the community kitchens with MIDIS, and demonstrating the viability and validity of the model at national level.

Work with the MML to design a protocol to provide technical support on nutrition, management, and sanitary health was a key step in demonstrating the legitimacy of the community kitchens. The research also generated empirical evidence of the community kitchens' structure, community contributions and challenges, creating a blueprint to replicate the model across the metropolitan district and in other cities. This evidence strengthened coordination with MIDIS to design a new and articulated strategy for providing food supplies to the most vulnerable groups in the city. A change in political administration interrupted further development of the national Hambre Cero (Zero Hunger) strategy that was due to be rolled out across Lima and other cities.

Work to limit crowding and contagion in food markets delivered a pilot e-commerce platform and digital wallet project in two municipalities in Lima and with three market associations. The Ministry of Production was exploring the potential of these innovations as part of its Innova tu Mercado (Innovate your Market) programme to help traditional food markets recover from the crisis and give vulnerable people greater access to fresh products.

Labour markets and social protection

Work on labour markets generated empirical evidence of the benefits of virtual training for vulnerable women, and contributed new insights on incentives to complete digital training, and the reason for attrition rates in crisis contexts. Work in both Peru and Argentina generated new understanding of the modalities of delivering online training to vulnerable people and increased understanding of attrition in online learning, the heterogeneity of applicants and their needs, and the need for flexible timetables and practical modules. In Argentina, the close technical relationship between CIPPEC and the Municipal Government of Buenos Aires led to strong ownership of the research findings, and provided a foundation for future coordination.

Final reflections

The research generated important policy impacts that increased community organisations' visibility and access to public finance, while demonstrating their resilience and contribution to food security. In Peru, it is likely that this initiative contributed to enhancing the food security of thousands of households across Lima, leaving a legislative legacy that had the potential to take this impact to national scale. However, this potential was limited by a context of political crisis and rapid turnover of administrations, which paralysed policy processes and led to the replacement of key interlocutors and discontinuation of government programmes.

Against this backdrop of ongoing uncertainty, the research conducted by GRADE provided an important evidence base to maintain the institutional memory of these social programmes, providing an entry point for dialogue with new authorities. At the same time, the combination of political crisis combined with global inflation underlines the ongoing relevance and need for community kitchens and labour market support mechanisms.

This experience highlighted how crisis creates a demand in government agencies for new ideas and solutions, increasing the willingness to act upon them and creating a window of opportunity to introduce innovations and influence public policy. However, across Latin America the pandemic was frequently accompanied by political and social turmoil, which also acted as a barrier to working with governments to provide rapid technical assistance and pursue evidence-informed policy analysis and innovation.

4.4 RIMISP – Strategic alliances to diagnose challenges, strengthen dialogue, and coordinate influencing strategies

Research project: Sowing Development: Small–Scale Agriculture and Food Security Resilient to Covid–19.

Project profile

The project aimed to contribute to the development of small- and medium-scale family farming to mitigate the negative impacts of Covid–19 on the food security of the most vulnerable urban and rural people, particularly women. It aimed to instigate policy and institutional change based on evidence and dialogue to improve opportunities for family agriculture; mitigate the impact on food security; and contribute to more sustainable, resilient, inclusive, and gender–sensitive agri–food systems.

Impact pathway

The RIMISP project delivered an impact pathway structured around three key stages: diagnostic, dialogue, and consolidating influence. There was a central emphasis on building strategic alliances to validate, position and legitimise research, and support influencing within focus territories. This strong emphasis on networking built on RIMISP's established methodology on influence chains (*eslabones para la incidencia*), which recognises impact as the culmination of multiple processes, many of which are beyond RIMISP's control. The methodology focused on identifying and describing relationships between actors, and shifting their behaviour and debates through interactions with project interventions.

Outcomes varied across focus countries, with formal dialogue groups established in Ecuador, Colombia, and Chile that started to build consensus around priority issues, working towards a policy agenda. In Mexico and Guatemala, the focus was on establishing connections and building trust with relevant stakeholders. In Mexico, this achieved a proposal for policy reform that would deliver both a saving in fiscal spending and increase the amount received by beneficiaries, and was therefore received as a feasible proposal. In Guatemala, a process of dialogue between local communities and politicians from different parties secured political commitments in the context of the 2023 municipal election campaign.

Impact pathway 4: Strategic alliances to diagnose challenges, strengthen dialogue, and coordinate influencing strategies

Diagnostic

Empirical evidence of the impact of the pandemic on food security and agri-food systems generated

Strategic local and regional partnerships identified to facilitate access to policy and decision-making spaces

Balance of flexibility and continuity in multi-country research design to respond to national context, capacities, adapt to contingencies, and work across multiple levels of authorities and decision makers

Research design and peer support between country partners to enhance quality and validity of research outputs and build researcher capacity

Identified civil society actors with legitimacy, leadership, and strong territorial convening power (where feasible)

Familiarisation meetings with ministries and other authorities

Identification of potential policy questions and gaps based on initial dialogue with territorial actors

Revision of survey in year 3 to consider learning from year 1 and shifting political and economic contexts, complemented with qualitative insights

Dialogue

Rural dialogue groups created based on social and political dynamics in areas of intervention

Research evidence aligned with priority regional issues and challenges

Examples of foundations for rural dialogue groups:
• Building on strategic alliances with partners with strong territorial presence (Chile)
• Establishing links to territorial institutions (Colombia, Ecuador)
• Working with rural academics and transition into territorial questions (Mexico)
• Focus on rebuilding social fabric as basis for territorial dialogue (Guatemala)

Rural dialogue groups define priority issues and key needs for technical assistance

Rural dialogue groups discuss and validate empirical research to contextualise challenges and explore solutions

Strong emphasis on building trust and guaranteeing effective and equitable participation of women in dialogue spaces

Consolidation of influence

Research positioned to legitimise policy influence

Engagement in political debates informed by evidence

Rural dialogue groups work across different levels of authorities as most appropriate to context

Influencing strategies adapted in response to shifting political and economic context and crises

Media engagement (TV, radio, press, web) to raise profile of project and issues addressed

Participation in academic seminars and conferences

Agreement established with secretary of agriculture in Huila (Colombia) to work together to generate projects (e.g. seed bank)

Evidence informed national conversation on right to food security around the revision of the Chilean constitution (rejected by referendum)

Evidence continues to inform debates around food price inflation and production costs in economic crises and conversations with Ministry of Agriculture on rural credit (Chile)

Source: Authors' own.

Activities – Sphere of control

The impact pathway was structured around the three key stages of diagnostic, dialogue, and consolidating influence. Research design was a key consideration in the diagnostic phase, taking account of differences in the national contexts, capacities and expertise of different research partners, to ensure flexibility without losing sight of the original and overarching research objectives. There was a strong emphasis on peer support in the design phase to enhance the quality and validity of research, and encourage knowledge exchange and capacity strengthening between teams.

The research design involved a survey to compare experience at two points in time to understand the effects of Covid-19 on food security in rural populations. This was validated with periodic qualitative interviews that highlighted additional concerns around household strategies to maintain food security, access to inputs and commercial markets for agricultural products, as well as access to rural credit. The qualitative component led to adaptations to the research design to include questions around governance as the complexity of the crisis and range of actors and drivers became more apparent.

Moving into the second phase of the study, the research instruments necessarily evolved to incorporate this learning and generate evidence that was relevant across different levels of authority. This agility gave the research validity across the evolving stages of the crisis, with evidence demonstrating how challenges also changed as markets and mobility opened up, while prices rose sharply due to global inflation.

Investment in identifying potential regional alliances and the formation of rural dialogue groups in each study area were central to the dialogue component of activities to highlight how research evidence aligned with regional issues and challenges. RIMISP placed strong emphasis on identifying local partners with strong local networks and connections, which gave the Centre the legitimacy and convening power to provide leadership in dialogue and policy engagement processes. Meetings and roundtables were held with ministries and other relevant authorities early in the research process to understand their priority issues and identify areas where there was demand for technical support. This generated rich learning on building stakeholder platforms, with different experiences emerging across the various research countries.
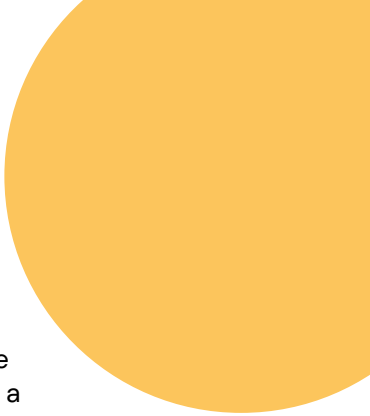
Influencing activities focused on positioning research to maximise its policy influence by working at the most appropriate levels of government, demonstrating agility to highlight the relevance of research findings to the evolving context. This approach to influencing was reinforced through communications and engagement activities including media engagement (via television, radio, press and web) to raise the profile of the project and the issues addressed. Participation in academic seminars and conferences also expanded the dialogue; for example, through a collaboration with the Overcoming Poverty Foundation (Fundación Superación de la Pobreza) in Chile to convene and organise an independent dialogue as part of the UN Food Systems Summit, which expanded its reach to new actors and increased the impact of the dialogue. RIMISP also co-convened an international seminar with GRADE on community experiences to overcome hunger in the pandemic.[3]

Outcomes – Sphere of influence

In Chile, where RIMISP has an established presence and research partnerships, rural dialogue groups were convened and implemented in La Araucanía y Los Lagos in collaboration with the Villarica Campus of the Catholic University of Chile (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile), building on an existing local presence and strong participation of territorial stakeholders. The RIMISP food security survey contributed new evidence and knowledge, which informed the national conversation on the right to food security during the debate around the revision of the Chilean constitution. The survey results received coverage in the national press, on television and regional radio, and were presented at a ministerial roundtable on investment in rural territories.

This evidence highlighted the challenges around food security. It increased the visibility of the impact of Covid-19 on female-headed households, which informed the public debate around the new constitution, reinforcing the importance of including the right to food security. The Chilean people rejected the proposed constitutional reform in a plebiscite in September 2022; however, the government was open to discussing the issues the research had identified (e.g. the issue of rural credit).

---

[3] See: *Seminario Internacional: Estrategias Comunitarias Contra el Hambre en Pandemia: Experiencias de Perú, Chile y Uruguay*.
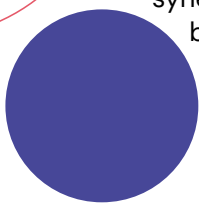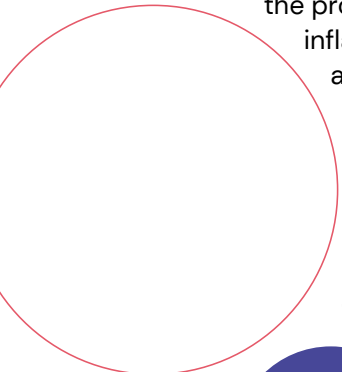
In Colombia, an agreement to convene a rural dialogue group was established with the agricultural secretary of Huila department. This facilitated broad participation, establishing an exchange of relevant information and a shared agenda with the Administrative and Special Planning Region (Región Administrativa y de Planeación Especial), to co-convene the Huila Rural Dialogue Group to bring together key stakeholders across the territory. This alliance facilitated a common understanding of the key challenges in food supply at departmental level, given the centrality of the Colombian agri-food system. It also led to stronger ties with the Huila Region National Learning Service (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje Región Huila), with a view to developing projects such as a seed bank based on the priorities agreed on by key departmental stakeholders and to work together towards institutional policy change. In addition, an initial collaboration was also established with the Office of Competitiveness and Employability (Oficina de Competitividad y Empleabilidad) to establish a rural dialogue group in Nariño.

These experiences placed strong emphasis on building trust and confidence between stakeholders as the foundation for more formal dialogue groups, guaranteeing effective and equitable participation of women in dialogue spaces. In Ecuador, the rural dialogue group convened agreements between several key stakeholders, including the Provincial Government of Guayas, Phytosanitary Regulation and Control Agency, and Guayas Prefecture. This collaboration delivered studies on diversification and sustainable production, strengthening capacities through a number of workshops with local actors. Technical assistance was also provided through demonstration plots to promote innovation and build resilience to uncertainty in the agricultural sector.

In Mexico and Guatemala, where the methodology and partnerships were much newer and the contexts less conducive to building territorial alliances, different strategies were applied. In Mexico, the process resulted in an institutional dialogue group of academics working on rural issues, with a view to moving conversations towards a more national focus. In Guatemala, where high levels of violence and the effects of a hurricane at the peak of the pandemic created a challenging working context, the focus was on supporting the reconstruction of the social fabric through influencing activities at territorial level, with a view to building the trust, legitimacy, and momentum needed to move towards influencing at the national level. In collaboration with Aproba-Sank, an organisation with strong territorial legitimacy, a participatory process brought local actors together to compile and build consensus around key local priorities. This included around 250 farmers from the Aj Awinel network, who highlighted the need to prioritise stronger commercial opportunities, promote family agriculture and place stronger emphasis on traditional knowledge. This list of proposals was presented to mayoral candidates from different political parties in a public forum with commitments to follow up secured.

Final reflections

The emphasis on rural dialogue groups in this impact pathway established institutional relationships and alliances, that in some cases may not only continue but could potentially lead to further outcomes beyond the project life cycle. Flexibility in research design was key for working across different Latin American contexts, while providing continuity across country studies. There were also numerous contingencies to address during the project life cycle beyond the pandemic itself, including economic and political crises, global inflation, elections and changes in key actors at multiple levels, social movements and protests, and climate disasters such as the hurricane in Guatemala.

The great diversity in experience across countries also highlighted the contextual challenges of convening dialogue groups, and the energy and investment that are needed to move beyond initial conversations to agreeing shared priorities and working together on advocacy initiatives. RIMISP works as a network of organisations, but not all research partners were network members. This required particular attention to establish clear rules and boundaries to balance differences across teams in order to make the most of potential synergies in research skills and capacities, and promote dialogue and knowledge sharing between teams.

Policy influencing can happen at multiple levels, with different research teams needing the flexibility to define the most appropriate level for their context. Understanding these actors and their priorities is key to defining project strategy, as well as keeping an eye on how these priorities may shift in response to evolving political and economic contexts. Working with groups at different territorial levels may generate some insights into the conditions that support sustainability at different levels. However, the success of stakeholder platforms depends on a broad range of factors and interpersonal and inter–institutional dynamics that are difficult to quantify and compare from one experience to another.

PROJECT DETAILS

Timeline
July 2020–August 2023

Budget
CA$1,388,700

Geographical focus
Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico

Other CORE outputs related to this project
Niño Eslava, D. and Gatellier, K. (2022) *Collective Action to Support Family Farming in Colombia*, Covid–19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Stories of Change, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2022.013

Thompson, J.; Ndung'u, N.; Albacete, M.; Suleri, A.Q.; Zahid, J. and Aftab, R. (2021) *The Impact of Covid–19 on Livelihoods and Food Security*, Covid–19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Research for Policy and Practice Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2021.001

4.5 Asuntos del Sur – Establishing a road map for new models of democratic and collaborative governance in Latin America
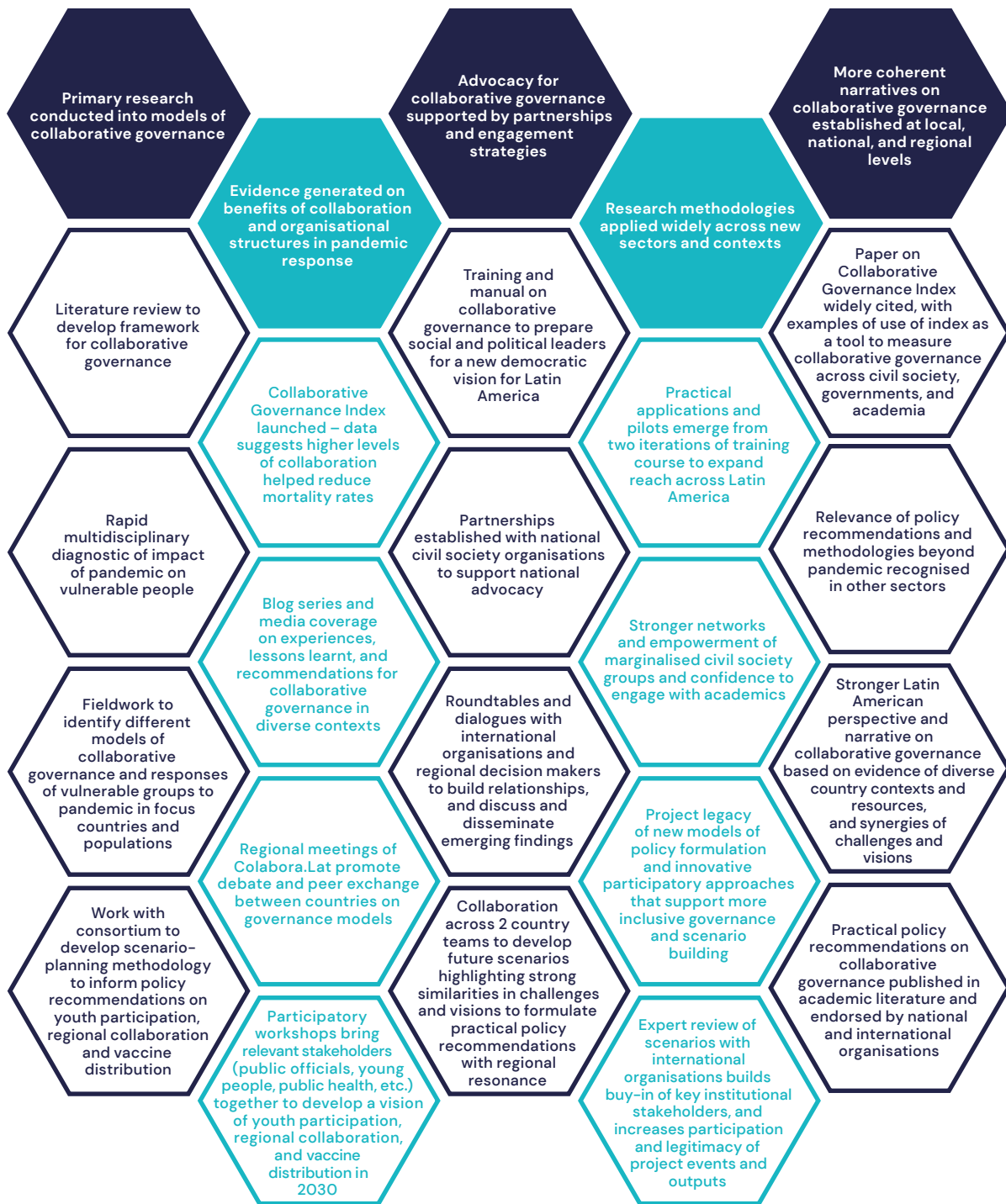
Research project: Colabora.Lat: Towards a New Model of Governance after Covid–19.

Project profile

This project was delivered through a consortium led by Asuntos del Sur (Argentina), in collaboration with the Universidad ICESI (Colombia), Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Argentina), Universidad de Santiago de Chile (Chile), and foundations Nosotrxs (Mexico), Diálogos (Guatemala), and Friedrich–Ebert–Stiftung (Bolivia). The project provided information and analysis on the impact of Covid–19 on social cohesion and collaborative democratic governance in Latin America to understand the impact on forms of social relations, the dynamics of collective action, trust and other psychosocial aspects, with a specific focus on the most affected populations including women, young people, poor urban and rural people, indigenous groups, Afro–descendant groups, migrants, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex+ (LGBTQI+) people.

In parallel, the project provided analysis of the public policies designed to protect vulnerable people and the different collaborative governance models manifested in the pandemic response in each of the countries studied. The project also developed a series of three scenarios to inform policy recommendations around youth participation, regional collaboration, and vaccine distribution across the continent.

Impact pathway 5: Establishing a road map for new models of democratic and collaborative governance in Latin America

Primary research conducted into models of collaborative governance

Advocacy for collaborative governance supported by partnerships and engagement strategies

More coherent narratives on collaborative governance established at local, national, and regional levels

Evidence generated on benefits of collaboration and organisational structures in pandemic response

Research methodologies applied widely across new sectors and contexts

Literature review to develop framework for collaborative governance

Training and manual on collaborative governance to prepare social and political leaders for a new democratic vision for Latin America

Paper on Collaborative Governance Index widely cited, with examples of use of index as a tool to measure collaborative governance across civil society, governments, and academia

Collaborative Governance Index launched – data suggests higher levels of collaboration helped reduce mortality rates

Practical applications and pilots emerge from two iterations of training course to expand reach across Latin America

Rapid multidisciplinary diagnostic of impact of pandemic on vulnerable people

Partnerships established with national civil society organisations to support national advocacy

Relevance of policy recommendations and methodologies beyond pandemic recognised in other sectors

Blog series and media coverage on experiences, lessons learnt, and recommendations for collaborative governance in diverse contexts

Stronger networks and empowerment of marginalised civil society groups and confidence to engage with academics

Fieldwork to identify different models of collaborative governance and responses of vulnerable groups to pandemic in focus countries and populations

Roundtables and dialogues with international organisations and regional decision makers to build relationships, and discuss and disseminate emerging findings

Stronger Latin American perspective and narrative on collaborative governance based on evidence of diverse country contexts and resources, and synergies of challenges and visions

Regional meetings of Colabora.Lat promote debate and peer exchange between countries on governance models

Project legacy of new models of policy formulation and innovative participatory approaches that support more inclusive governance and scenario building

Work with consortium to develop scenario-planning methodology to inform policy recommendations on youth participation, regional collaboration and vaccine distribution

Collaboration across 2 country teams to develop future scenarios highlighting strong similarities in challenges and visions to formulate practical policy recommendations with regional resonance

Practical policy recommendations on collaborative governance published in academic literature and endorsed by national and international organisations

Participatory workshops bring relevant stakeholders (public officials, young people, public health, etc.) together to develop a vision of youth participation, regional collaboration, and vaccine distribution in 2030

Expert review of scenarios with international organisations builds buy-in of key institutional stakeholders, and increases participation and legitimacy of project events and outputs

Source: Authors' own.

Activities – Sphere of control

The project was carried out in three phases: (1) a rapid multidisciplinary diagnostic of the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable people; (2) in-depth case studies to build a repository of innovative community practices and an index of the needs of vulnerable groups in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico; and (3) analysis of community practices and public policies in the region to outline policy recommendations and best practice to share with community leaders, decision makers, and multilateral organisations.

The project produced the Collaborative Governance Index based on evaluation of qualitative and quantitative evidence of different government and civil society models and approaches to support stronger inclusion of vulnerable people and communities in Covid-19 responses during 2020-21. The index tracked the different types of actors involved in collaborations, such as local governments, CSOs, and the private sector.
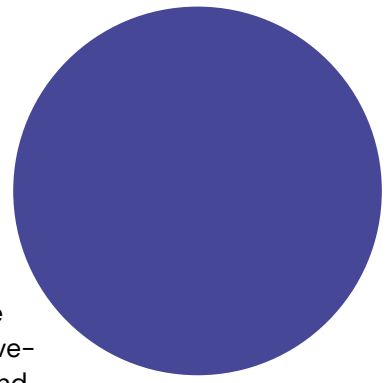
The project also documented some of the different types of collaborative governance that took place in the context of the pandemic through a series of interviews and active-listening workshops to build relationships between policy and thematic researchers and vulnerable communities in the study regions of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico. This work established an innovative evidence base of the effects of the pandemic, political and community responses, and capacities of vulnerable groups including young people, migrants, Afro-descendants, indigenous people, marginalised rural and urban groups, and LGBTQI+ communities that were used to inform a series of recommendations on how to make collaborative governance more effective.

Another element of this research was scenario planning to explore hypothetical futures and make recommendations around the best future policy options. This research covered three key topics: how to promote youth participation in democratic processes; mechanisms to strengthen regional cooperation; and more equitable vaccine acquisition and distribution to develop scenarios to support collaboration over competition. This research methodology was developed by experts from across the consortium and involved a series of participatory workshops. It brought together civil society, decision makers, and activists in the governance space, with strong emphasis on the participation of youth groups to explore youth participation; public health officials to consider vaccine distribution; and international organisations to reflect on regional collaboration to discuss and develop scenarios and policy pathways looking ahead to 2030. Country teams then collaborated in pairs to compare findings, further develop scenarios, and outline policy recommendations: Chile and Colombia collaborated on youth participation in democratic processes; Bolivia and Guatemala worked together to explore more equitable vaccine acquisition and distribution; and Argentina and Mexico focused on mechanisms to strengthen regional cooperation. This process identified a high level of synergy in country experiences that suggested potential for replicability of policy recommendations across different country contexts.

To maximise the uptake of this evidence and create space for reflection on the policy implications across diverse decision-making audiences, these outputs were developed through numerous roundtables, a book and a training course, with a strong emphasis on knowledge exchange, both across the project consortium and with relevant stakeholders across the Latin America region.

Outcomes – Sphere of influence

The Collaborative Governance Index became a key data source that enabled deeper analysis of how different models of collaborative governance related to mortality rates. The publication of the index was accompanied by a blog on how it could be applied to encourage its broader use and uptake. This was published in the widely cited article 'Governing a Pandemic: Assessing the Role of Collaboration on Latin American Responses to the Covid-19 Crisis', which received coverage in *The Washington Post*. The article is one of the four most cited articles of the past three years in the prestigious *Journal of Politics in Latin America*.

The legacy of the in-depth case studies was greater clarity on and definition of different types of social organisation, and how they could work alongside government and the private sector to inform public policy conversations in different contexts. This work increased the visibility of participating marginalised groups and contributed to a sense of greater empowerment: they had a stronger sense of their own value within the national social context and were able to talk about their own experiences of how they achieved collaboration. Building on these local experiences, the project delivered new empirical evidence at national and regional levels that strengthened understanding of collaborative governance, and promoted debate and dialogue on emerging recommendations.
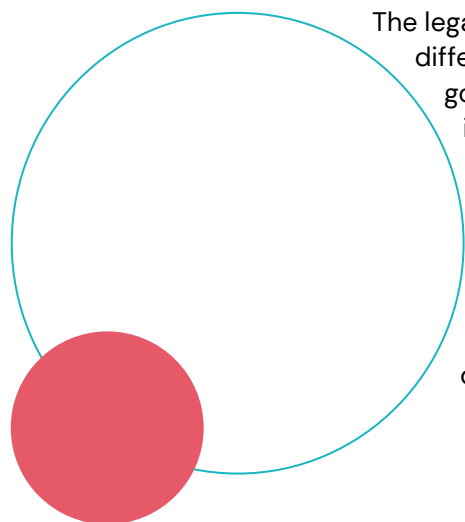
The regional element of the project and strong engagement across the consortium was essential to bring these diverse experiences together, with regional meetings each year to reflect on national experiences and how these contributed to a bigger picture at the national level. This built on a strong ethos of collaboration and respect across the consortium, which gave all teams an equal voice in contributing to the emerging picture of the Latin American experience. Consortium members strengthened their linkages with vulnerable groups; for example, working with informal groups in Mexico and young people in Guatemala, while in Chile the research strengthened relationships between academics and local governments. The evidence was used to produce a book that discussed how collaborative governance functioned across Latin America, considering the diversity in contexts and access to resources to provide a series of recommendations to inform future governance initiatives.

The evidence was also used to develop a training course on collaborative governance to prepare social and political leaders working towards a new democratic vision for Latin America. The training was supported by a manual that shared the knowledge generated from this research and provided access to the evidence-informed practices, policies, and tools identified and developed across the region. The course was delivered in late 2022 with the aim of transferring this knowledge to public functionaries, CSOs, activists, and decision makers to build a stronger narrative around collaborative governance and share experiences from different contexts of Covid-19 across Latin America. It aimed to support participants to identify practical applications of this knowledge linked to their existing organisational work. Following the course, the project team worked with selected projects to implement these ideas; for example, supporting a social organisation that worked with youth migrants in Costa Rica, and an initiative in Ecuador to develop an action plan to strengthen the collaborative work of the Red Cross in Loja. A second edition of the course aimed to build on this success and further expand the reach across Latin America.

The work on scenarios incorporated a process of technical review with experts from influential national and international organisations. This helped to establish a broader consensus around the scenarios and their policy implications. These engagements – for example, with the Democratic Governance Area of United Nations Development Programme, Argentina and Casa Patria Grande in Argentina, the International Labour Organization in Bolivia, Oxfam in Guatemala, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat), among others – helped to build the buy-in and ownership of technical experts. It also increased the participation and legitimacy of engagement events and outputs, opening a regional discussion on collaborative governance in the context of increasing examples of closing democratic space across the region. A key outcome of this work was the process of shared reflection that identified numerous synergies in governance challenges across countries with very different national contexts. These synergies and shared experiences contributed to a stronger sense of a Latin American perspective and narrative on collaborative governance.

Final reflections

The project has expanded understanding of the concept of collaborative governance that has multiple practical applications and has resonated beyond the context of Covid-19. For example, the methodological approach was recently applied to explore the concept of governance within technological transformation. The aforementioned paper has been cited by academics in Jordan, Taiwan, China and the US, as well as in numerous citations linked to the Latin American context. It has become a key reference on how to measure collaborative governance in a broad range of contexts. For example, it has been used as a tool by students at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella and University of Buenos Aires (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Argentina, and they will potentially carry this thinking and methodology forward into their careers.

Beyond the academic sphere, the project has left a strong legacy of practical policy recommendations that numerous regional and national institutions and decision makers have reviewed and endorsed. This work has also helped to develop a new Latin American perspective of collaborative governance, and demonstrated how this thinking and the policy recommendations it has generated remain highly relevant in a post-Covid-19 world where democratic spaces are frequently under threat. The project placed strong emphasis on the practical applications of the knowledge generated through the delivery of a training course and supporting materials that included a practical component to promote new pilots in diverse contexts that will remain a reference point beyond the project life cycle.

Finally the impact of the project on the vulnerable groups involved in the research, and the empowering effect of the work to increase the visibility of these groups and help them to understand and advocate for more collaborative governance, has far-reaching potential for longer-term change at individual and community levels.

PROJECT DETAILS

Timeline
August 2020–November 2023

Budget
CA$1,338,800

Geographical focus
Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico

Other CORE outputs related to this project
Bianchi, M.; Coda, F.; Cyr, J.; Heffernan, I. and Meeker, J. (2023) *Effective Governance Responses to Crises: Lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic*, Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Research for Policy and Practice Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: **10.19088/CORE.2023.011**

Cyr, J.; Bianchi, M.; Lara, I.F. and Coda, F. (2023) '**(Re-)Thinking a Collaborative Research Model After Covid-19: Introducing Colabora.Lat**', *IDS Bulletin* 54.2: 197–208, DOI: **10.19088/1968-2023.140**

4.6 ARI – Building a knowledge hub in closed policy spaces to convene and coordinate a community of practice to promote more universal social protection systems in the Arab region
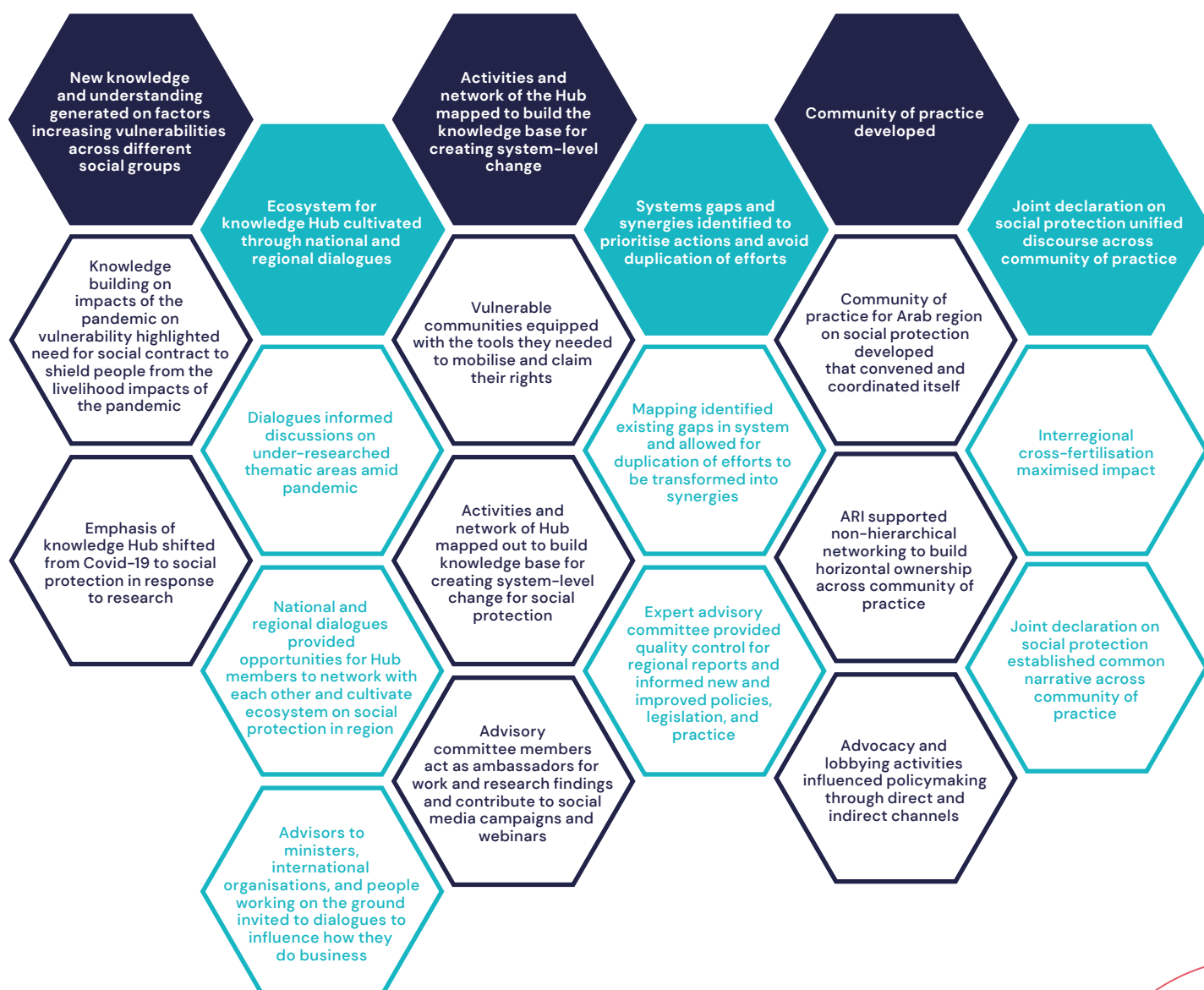
Research project: Promoting Resilience in Covid-19 in MENA: Building Inclusive and Effective Social Protection and Safety Nets.

Project profile

ARI is an independent thinktank working with expert partners in the Arab region and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It conducts research and policy analysis, providing a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, gender equality, human rights, and social justice.

The research project focused on the promotion of inclusive and effective social security and assistance during and after the pandemic in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. Social protection is interpreted differently in each country; some countries focus on poverty-targeting programmes, while others employ subsidy schemes and unemployment benefits or labour market activation interventions. The research explored how social protection initiatives could be effective, sustainable and integrated, ensuring inclusiveness and social security within and across the four countries, to eventually inform a regional perspective. The project aimed to provide stakeholders with the critical research needed to inform and consolidate their efforts to engage concerned communities in different decision-making processes.

Impact pathway 6: Building a knowledge hub in closed policy spaces to convene and coordinate a community of practice to promote more universal social protection systems in the Arab region

New knowledge and understanding generated on factors increasing vulnerabilities across different social groups

Activities and network of the Hub mapped to build the knowledge base for creating system–level change

Community of practice developed

Ecosystem for knowledge Hub cultivated through national and regional dialogues

Systems gaps and synergies identified to prioritise actions and avoid duplication of efforts

Joint declaration on social protection unified discourse across community of practice

Knowledge building on impacts of the pandemic on vulnerability highlighted need for social contract to shield people from the livelihood impacts of the pandemic

Vulnerable communities equipped with the tools they needed to mobilise and claim their rights

Community of practice for Arab region on social protection developed that convened and coordinated itself

Dialogues informed discussions on under–researched thematic areas amid pandemic

Mapping identified existing gaps in system and allowed for duplication of efforts to be transformed into synergies

Interregional cross–fertilisation maximised impact

Emphasis of knowledge Hub shifted from Covid–19 to social protection in response to research

Activities and network of Hub mapped out to build knowledge base for creating system–level change for social protection

ARI supported non–hierarchical networking to build horizontal ownership across community of practice

National and regional dialogues provided opportunities for Hub members to network with each other and cultivate ecosystem on social protection in region

Expert advisory committee provided quality control for regional reports and informed new and improved policies, legislation, and practice

Joint declaration on social protection established common narrative across community of practice

Advisory committee members act as ambassadors for work and research findings and contribute to social media campaigns and webinars

Advocacy and lobbying activities influenced policymaking through direct and indirect channels

Advisors to ministers, international organisations, and people working on the ground invited to dialogues to influence how they do business

Source: Authors' own.

Activities – Sphere of control

Across the consortium, the capacity- and institution-building aspects of the grant facilitated the production of more knowledge publications than is usually possible through more traditional, single-organisation and grantmaking processes. Part of the success and reach of the project and the Arab Region Hub for Social Protection came from the vast array of outputs on the 'social protection' topic that had been compiled and uploaded to the Hub platform.

On-the-ground research highlighted that what people needed during the pandemic was a social contract with resilient social protection infrastructures to shield people from negative livelihood implications. Social policy was therefore identified as the priority, shifting the focus of the Hub from general Covid-19 responses to social protection reforms more particularly.

National and regional dialogues provided opportunities for members of the Hub to network with each other and to cultivate an ecosystem on social protection in the region. The activities and network of the Hub were mapped out to build a knowledge base for creating system-level change for more inclusive social protection systems in the region. This mapping also identified existing gaps in the prevailing systems and allowed for duplication of efforts to be transformed into synergies. While the Hub needed a focal point in the form of ARI to coordinate and convene the network, ARI ensured management of the network was soft and loose, adopting a horizontal structure instead of a hierarchical one, building a sense of shared ownership for all.

The project formed an advisory committee of 14 experts as a key tool for informing new and improved policies, and legislative reforms and practice. The Hub could draw on this committee for their policy and practice recommendations. The committee included a variety of stakeholders (including academics, and representatives of NGOs and international organisations) with different thematic areas of expertise and from different countries across the region to provide a breadth of knowledge and experience.

Outcomes – Sphere of influence

A coordinated community of practice and knowledge emerged from the networking dialogues, supported by a virtual go-to space where professionals dedicated to exploring, understanding, and advocating for universal social protections in Arab states could share ideas, success stories and lessons learnt, as well as explore different opportunities for collaborative action. While an epistemic community of practice existed in the region on social protection, there was limited coordination prior to ARI convening the regional dialogues. Advisors to ministers, international organisations, practitioners, researchers, and activists were all invited to the dialogues with the hope of influencing social welfare policies and programming.

The research team equipped vulnerable communities with the tools they needed to mobilise and claim their rights. The dialogues succeeded in informing discussions on an under-visited research topic amid the pandemic, or – more specifically – a topic that is often addressed from a technical point of view that overlooks underlying politico-economic factors. A joint declaration outlined the community's approach to making social protection schemes in the Arab region more integrated, effective, inclusive and viable, unifying its members' discourses on 'building universal social protection systems in turbulent Arab contexts.[4] The community identified interregional cross-fertilisation as an important tool to maximise the power of the Hub and fully realise the project's objectives.

Final reflections

The Hub was established with an online presence and editorial identity,[5] and the founding members, along with advisory committee members and the Hub's associates, signed the joint declaration. The strong relationships built across the Hub mean that the network is likely to remain even after the project funding has ceased. People will continue to work on social protection, exchanging ideas and exploring areas of partnership and cooperation. ARI intended to index its work in a visually attractive way and popularise it, adding infographics and other creative communication tools. On social media and the website, ARI has continued to share and map emerging knowledge on social protection in the region, making the Hub a go-to place for people conducting evidence-based, policy-oriented research on the topic. In the future, the Hub could act as a focal point to join up existing social protection communities of practice and knowledge to share insights beyond the scope of the region.

The ability to shift the core focus of the original project from general state and non-state responses to Covid-19, to social protection reforms more specifically, highlights the benefits of the reflexive nature of the project. Being agile and incorporating the new spectrum of knowledge into the project's processes lends substantial proof to the value of CORE's adaptive approach. The Hub's model offers lessons for other communities of practice and networks wanting to persist and remain relevant to their members – especially how the purposeful elimination of a perceived hierarchy may contribute to this persistence through its distancing from more traditional and short-term project lifecycles.

---

4 Declaration on Building Universal Social Protection in the Arab Region.
5 Arab Region Hub for Social Protection.

4.7 SDPI – Building consensus across politically polarised stakeholders and influencing policy
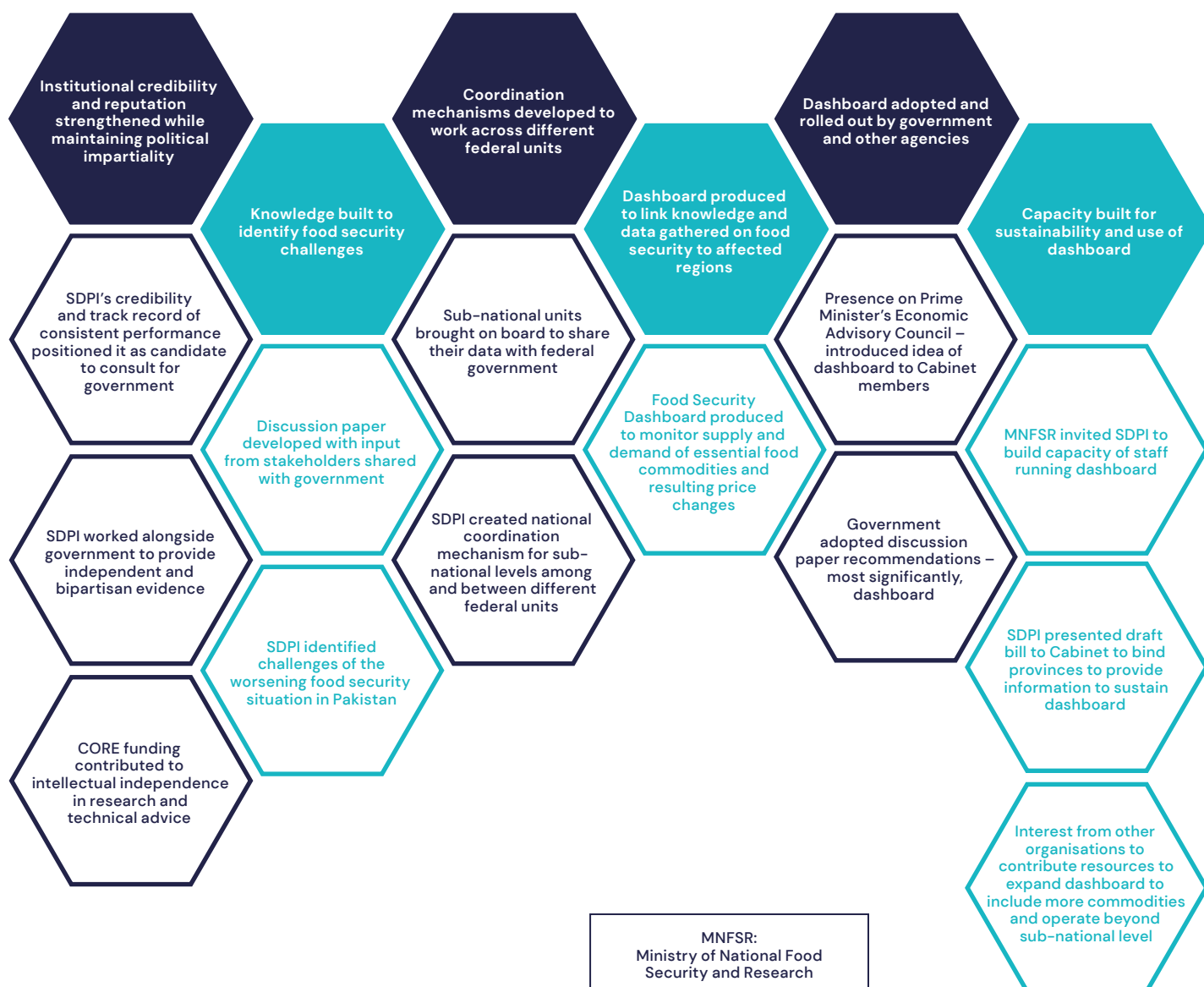
Research project: [Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises, Food Security, and Evolving Social Protection Mechanisms to Deal with Covid-19 in Pakistan](#).

Project profile

SDPI was founded in August 1992 on the recommendation of the Pakistan National Conservation Strategy, also called Pakistan's Agenda 21. The conservation strategy placed Pakistan's socioeconomic development within the context of a national environmental plan. This highly acclaimed document, approved by the Federal Cabinet in March 1992, outlined the need for an independent non-profit organisation to serve as a source of expertise for policy analysis and development, policy intervention, and policy and programme advisory services.

The research project provided evidence-based advice to the Government of Pakistan to manage the Covid-19 crisis, guide rapid policy responses, and develop measures to build resilience for the post-pandemic period. It generated and fed information to a national Food Security Dashboard to facilitate the supply of food commodities from surplus districts to deficit districts. The project also mapped formal and informal small and medium-sized enterprises in the country, providing evidence on the effectiveness of a stimulus package to strengthen national small and medium-sized enterprise policy. In addition, given that existing social safety nets are insufficient to support the 60 per cent of Pakistan's labour force working in informal undocumented sectors of the economy, in-depth analysis of existing social protection mechanisms was urgently needed to devise a roadmap for a universal social protection regime in Pakistan. The project aimed to fill information and action gaps, serving as a bridge between policymakers and the millions of daily wage earners in need in rural and urban areas, leading to positive impacts on the livelihoods of millions of vulnerable Pakistanis.

Impact pathway 7: Building consensus across politically polarised stakeholders and influencing policy

Institutional credibility and reputation strengthened while maintaining political impartiality

Knowledge built to identify food security challenges

Coordination mechanisms developed to work across different federal units

Dashboard produced to link knowledge and data gathered on food security to affected regions

Dashboard adopted and rolled out by government and other agencies

Capacity built for sustainability and use of dashboard

SDPI's credibility and track record of consistent performance positioned it as candidate to consult for government

Sub-national units brought on board to share their data with federal government

Presence on Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council – introduced idea of dashboard to Cabinet members

Discussion paper developed with input from stakeholders shared with government

Food Security Dashboard produced to monitor supply and demand of essential food commodities and resulting price changes

MNFSR invited SDPI to build capacity of staff running dashboard

SDPI worked alongside government to provide independent and bipartisan evidence

SDPI created national coordination mechanism for sub-national levels among and between different federal units

Government adopted discussion paper recommendations – most significantly, dashboard

SDPI identified challenges of the worsening food security situation in Pakistan

SDPI presented draft bill to Cabinet to bind provinces to provide information to sustain dashboard

CORE funding contributed to intellectual independence in research and technical advice

Interest from other organisations to contribute resources to expand dashboard to include more commodities and operate beyond sub-national level

MNFSR:
Ministry of National Food Security and Research

Source: Authors' own.

Activities – Sphere of control

SDPI produced a discussion paper on the worsening food security situation, which was developed and shared with the wider network of stakeholders for their input, then shared with the Government of Pakistan. The Food Security Dashboard was created to monitor the supply and demand of essential food commodities and resulting changes, with regard to physical and economic access. The institute's in-house team identified essential food commodities and prepared a plan for data collection from the provinces at district level. Punjab province was selected as a pilot region for the dashboard. SDPI identified the indicators for which data was to be collected to populate the FSDB to use as a policy tool.

A steering committee was set up and a technical working group created, led by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR), to guide and inform the process of developing the dashboard. With support from the Office of the Prime Minister and MNFSR, data for two selected commodities (wheat and sugar) was collected on a daily basis for a month, then the SDPI team entered it into the system. The institute then used its presence on the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council to introduce

the idea to Cabinet members. The SDPI research team also drafted a bill to present to the Cabinet, to commit provinces to provide information to sustain the FSDB. There are two processes for a bill to be passed: (1) the bill is discussed in Parliament and voted on; or (2) for urgent matters, a draft bill is sent directly to the president as an ordinance and directly becomes a bill. The bill drafted for the use of the Food Security Dashboard followed the second process.

The first presentation of the complete Food Security Dashboard was made to the Cabinet in February 2021, where members were briefed about the dashboard, how it worked, and the most important challenges to sustaining it. As a result of this, the Cabinet decided to hand over maintenance and management of the dashboard to MNFSR and requested support from SDPI to build the capacity of MNFSR staff to run it. With support from the FCDO Pakistan office, SDPI provided orientation to provincial MNFSR staff on data collection, entry and submission to the dashboard. Through the Economic Advisory Council, the institute also emphasised the importance of research for the second phase of the national Agriculture Transformation Plan.

Bringing district-level units on board to share their data with the federal government was a key part of this process and provided the mandate for decisions to be made about this data at the provincial level.

Outcomes – Sphere of influence

The government approved the development and use of the Food Security Dashboard to monitor the supply and demand of essential food commodities and resulting price changes to manage the problem of food insecurity that arose during the first wave of the Covid-19 virus.

SDPI created a national coordination mechanism at sub-national level, which was vital to the adoption of the dashboard. Coordination to facilitate sharing of data among and between different federal units and provinces ensured that the dashboard could function as intended, able to look across provinces with sufficient levels of data and react to food supply and demand. The most challenging and defining moment was coordinating this response across the vast and politically polarised country – where some federal units were ruled by opposition political parties and not aligned to the central government – and achieving consensus among all stakeholders and provinces.

SDPI continued to closely monitor progress on the FSDB after its handover to MNFSR. The institute has continued reaching out to different donors working on food security–related issues to get support to launch a holistic capacity–building activity for the government officials involved in maintaining the dashboard.

Following the passing of the bill and the creation of the FSDB there was a change of government. As a result, the dashboard innovation was pitched again, with hopes that it would expand to include more commodities and operate beyond the national level across provinces. While SDPI did not have the resources itself to take this expansion forward, other organisations have expressed interest.

Final reflections

SDPI obtained access to policymakers as a result of its established reputation for impartiality and innovation. It is the oldest independent thinktank in Pakistan, with high levels of international credibility built on a track record of consistent performance. This reputation and credibility positioned SDPI as a strong candidate for consultation by the Government of Pakistan.

TTI's support from 2008 to 2018 was critical in building the capacity and calibre of the institute, enabling it to maintain its intellectual independence and provide technical support irrespective of political change. SDPI works with the government but is not government funded, so has no political tag attached to it, enhancing its ability to work with a broad range of stakeholders across the political spectrum. Furthermore, the FSDB was proposed at no cost to the public purse and the innovation did not come from a minister or government, which may have kept the idea from being discarded by the new government or ruling party when they came to power.

SDPI retained the technical team that built and maintained the dashboard software, so the FSDB would be able to persist beyond the project funding. By maintaining teams and project activities after a project is over, SDPI is able to gain momentum at short notice whenever the need for an intervention occurs, with no need to invest time in building new teams. This strategy has allowed SDPI to remain relevant whatever next crisis or issue arises.

When floods occurred in Pakistan, the policy focus was diverted to relief and rehabilitation efforts, affecting work with the MNFSR to keep the dashboard updated on a daily basis. SDPI prepared for a renewed engagement strategy once government focus shifted back to business as usual through consultative meetings, roundtables, and policy outreach events to train the new government team on the instruments and tools for tracking the availability of food.

4.8 ICRW – Amplifying under-represented voices to share experiences and advocate for the rights and entitlements of informal workers in policy discourse

Research project: REBUILD: Covid-19 and Women in the Informal Economy in Kenya, Uganda and India.

Project profile

ICRW is a global research institute with offices in Washington DC, Nairobi, Kampala, and New Delhi. Its research evidence identifies women's contributions to society, and obstacles that prevent them from being economically independent and able to fully participate in society. ICRW translates these insights into a path of action that honours women's human rights, ensures gender equality, and creates the conditions in which all women can thrive.

The research project aimed to inform gender-responsive, accountable, and democratic policies and strategies that ensured vulnerable people affected by Covid-19, such as female workers in informal urban economies, could recover and rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Research in three urban settings in India, Kenya, and Uganda generated data on the impact of the Covid-19 response on women workers in the informal economy. This provided an understanding of how gender norms, impact pathways to economic empowerment, and the gendered impacts of violence and access to essential health services could inform policy that responded to the specific needs of women workers in these informal economies. This impact pathway concentrates on the work ICRW undertook in India.

Impact pathway 8: Amplifying under-represented voices to share experiences and advocate for the rights and entitlements of informal workers in policy discourse

Key stakeholders connected to amplify the voices of grass-roots groups and coordinate and share evidence

Recommendations developed to improve the rights and entitlements of informal women workers

Understanding of informal women workers' experiences built

Evidence synthesised to make informal women workers more visible and influence discourse and policies that affect them

Evidence used to advocate for rights and entitlements of informal women workers

ICRW acted as knowledge broker for grass-roots organisations to reach and connect to informal women workers to learn from them, and synthesise and communicate their experiences

Recommendations developed in consultation with informal women workers and organisations working for/with them

Formative research through quantitative and qualitative surveys, produced life stories and personal narratives to understand target groups' livelihood transformations and coping strategies due to Covid-19

Synthesised evidence used to:
– increase visibility and amplify voices of informal women workers
– influence policy discourse and inform design and implementation of policy frameworks

Knowledge and advocacy products (research briefs, policy briefs, audio-visual products) developed to advocate for greater rights and entitlements, and facilitate greater access for informal women workers

Project advisory group built with representatives from trade unions, academia, and other critical participants to connect with policymakers

ICRW produced brief: *India's Policy Response to Covid-19 and the Gendered Impact on Urban Informal Workers in Delhi NCR*

Review of macroeconomic data, policies, and literature

ICRW captured informal women workers' experiences of how policies were implemented on the ground and responsiveness to their needs

Sharing experiences and data in a more accessible way helped in conversations with policymakers, but also in unions and partner organisations

ICRW convened meetings with relevant stakeholder organisations to understand how best to use data they were gathering for advocacy

Accessibility of research to practitioner and urban audiences increased through podcast series discussing diverse views of marginalised youth, gender, and caste identities on issues relating to women and work

Through engaging with multiple different partners, network members learnt from each other and drew on different experiences

Research evidence promotes knowledge exchange between grass-roots groups and use for advocacy at local governance level

Source: Authors' own.

Activities – Sphere of control

ICRW reviewed macroeconomic data, policies and literature, and conducted primary research to identify key areas of vulnerability for informal women workers in urban centres as a result of policy responses during the Covid-19 pandemic. ICRW also assessed the gendered impact of these policy responses. The research aimed to identify the urban governance infrastructures and implementation mechanisms that were most effective for delivery of Covid-19 relief measures, and the resilience strategies women workers adopted to cope with vulnerabilities emerging from the pandemic.

ICRW convened various activities with women workers (including street vendors, construction workers, and domestic workers), frontline staff of CSOs, and key informants. With the help of partner organisations working with domestic workers and street vendors – Chetanalaya and the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) – ICRW engaged in workshops with women and facilitated in-person group discussions to learn from their experiences and synthesise evidence to make these experiences of informal women workers more visible. ICRW also established a project advisory group, with representatives from trade unions and academia, and other

critical participants to understand how best to use the data the Centre was gathering for advocacy, and to identify a suitable design and way of implementing policies with consideration for how these could affect the wellbeing of informal women workers on the ground.

ICRW identified women who were likely to be influential and strong advocates for change within their communities, working with them to produce life stories and personal narratives to understand how the women had experienced transformation in their lives due to the pandemic and identify their various resilience strategies to cope with these changes. The testimonies of the experiences of domestic workers and street vendors were synthesised and used to develop a series of recommendations in consultation with the women and community organisations. The experiences and knowledge were translated into various media and knowledge products, and shared with different stakeholders to use as advocacy in their workspaces.

ICRW India produced a policy brief titled *India's Policy Response to Covid-19 and the Gendered Impact on Urban Informal Workers in Delhi NCR* through conducting a policy landscaping study, which included thematic briefs on economic wellbeing, food security, shelter, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence. The landscaping study assessed the gendered impact of pandemic-induced lockdowns on urban informal workers in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), and to assess the overall effectiveness of the various state and non-state responses for relief and recovery. A five-episode podcast series titled *Women and Work: Why it Matters!*, made in partnership with intersectional media organisation Feminism in India, discussed issues of paid, unpaid, and caste-segregated work for women, and mechanisms to recover from the pandemic. In January 2022, ICRW Asia also released an illustrated report with findings from its review of macroeconomic data, policies, and literature to establish pre-existing vulnerabilities for women workers and how these were aggravated during the first wave of Covid-19 in India.

Outcomes – Sphere of influence

In the podcast series, the ICRW research team worked to ensure diverse representation and views regarding the issues in question. The podcast was in Hinglish (Hindi and English), which aimed to reach urban audiences across the country who engaged with issues of women and work. Their guest speakers represented young women, marginal religious identities, marginalised gender and caste identities, and varied geographical representation. This approach ensured that the findings had an intersectional lens, were relevant to the marginalised groups targeted in the research design, and could bring out the nuance of different identities; for example, around caste, religion, and migrant and marital status. For their advocacy efforts, ICRW convened grass-roots organisations with women worker leaders to share research findings using more accessible language. This ensured that lessons learnt from their experience were used more broadly and that ICRW built a collective understanding of how to use the findings in advocacy efforts at local governance level (municipal).

The podcast was crucial in reaching practitioners who would not generally access heavy and bulky research reports. This was based on a conscious effort to make research findings more accessible to practitioners on the ground. The project established a network of grass-roots organisations working with domestic workers and street vendors, and supported knowledge exchange between them to enhance the learning from one organisation's experience to another's. The network supported the convening of activities and facilitated strong participation from grass-roots organisations.

The project established a new knowledge base of the experiences of women workers, producing data and stories of experiences that were used in conversations with officials. Sharing experiences and data in a more digestible way helped influence conversations with policymakers, and within unions and partner organisations working to ensure women's access to information and policies or schemes is improved. ICRW identified how women's experiences could inform policy by looking at how it was implemented on the ground, and how responsive it was to the women workers' needs.

Final reflections

The grass-roots organisations partnering with ICRW were embedded within the communities of interest prior to the CORE funding, which meant that once ICRW received funding, it could focus resources on its convening role rather than on building relationships to embed itself with the domestic worker and street vendor communities. The network of grass-roots organisations is likely to persist beyond the project because these organisations were already in contact with each other before the research project.

Entitlement to support from the government was just one piece of a puzzle in the stories of coping and survival. There were also barriers to policy change due to the Indian government having difficulties in specifying its women's economic empowerment policy, so it was looking to international partners for support with this. Establishing a clear policy influence in this project in the Indian context was therefore a long and convoluted process, where ICRW's contribution to the discourse would not be clearly attributable. There was a conflict of interest in India because, although the importance of networking and collaborating was made clear through the project, there was also a need to avoid being seen as collectivising or showing strength in numbers. Being in the CSO space is important as there is strength and value in evidence – it is important to know how to take data and evidence to the right people at the right time.

ICRW Asia collaborated with NASVI to help the ICRW team with recruiting a representative sample of informal women workers (street vendors and domestic workers) drawn from four regions within the NCR: Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida, and Ghaziabad. NASVI is an organisation working to protect the livelihood rights of thousands of street vendors across the country. With a strong presence among street vendors in Delhi, the association helped ICRW reach women workers in the selected geographies across the NCR. The partnership between ICRW and NASVI was crucial since NASVI worked closely with implementation and on-the-ground governance structures to help street vendors and domestic workers access their entitlements. The learnings from the ICRW study contributed to effective knowledge sharing with this group and were used for advocacy at ground level.

PROJECT DETAILS

Timeline
September 2021–October 2022

Budget
CA$900,000

Geographical focus
India, Kenya, and Uganda

Other CORE outputs related to this project
Esquivel, V. *et al.* (2022) *Why Covid-19 Recovery Must be Gender-Responsive*, Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Research for Policy and Practice Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: **10.19088/CORE.2022.001**

Vyas, A.; Banerjee, P.; Achyut, P. and Wilson, E. (2023) *Fostering Gender Diversity and Inclusiveness in Street Vendor Associations in India*, Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Stories of Change, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: **10.19088/CORE.2023.001**

5. Conclusions

The development of the CORE project impact pathways has highlighted the breadth and depth of impact that the CORE programme cohort has produced. The documentation of these impact pathways is part of the legacy of the CORE programme to demonstrate the range of innovative approaches used to engage decision makers and bring community voices into research processes against the challenging backdrop of the Covid–19 pandemic. These impact pathways were used to promote knowledge exchange and share learning between projects at the CORE global meeting in Dakar, Senegal, in January 2023. Looking ahead, it is hoped that they will also provide a reference point for future research programmes and inspire other Southern thinktanks and research institutions to innovate with their engagement strategies, and embed strategies to build the legitimacy and ownership of research processes.

The CORE project experiences highlighted the key role that research can play in a crisis, and how research institutes can leverage their position and connections to inform, accompany, and evaluate government responses. The examples presented in this report demonstrate the added value of working closely with government structures at national, provincial, and municipal levels to align research questions with political priorities, creating space for dialogue and discussion. In some contexts, research evidence may have the potential to highlight the gaps in a response and give legitimacy to voices outside of government; however, in the context of evolving polycrises, the shrinking of political space is a sad reality that cannot be ignored.

The impact pathways also demonstrated the rich CORE experience of strengthening research processes through alliances with civil society to build legitimacy and embed evidence within social realities, using the research process to create a voice for these groups, deliver processes to organise and prioritise their needs, and increase their visibility in policy conversations.

Another important legacy of the CORE programme is the research and engagement capacity that has been strengthened across the global South. Many CORE projects have worked with local partners across the globe with a strong emphasis on facilitating relationships among national research teams, guaranteeing quality across different contexts and challenges, and supporting knowledge exchange between diverse experiences. These research teams have not only delivered compelling research evidence in the most adverse data collection conditions of repeated lockdowns and ongoing uncertainty; they have also delivered innovative engagement strategies that have established new relationships and alliances that have strong potential to continue beyond CORE. This unique collection of impact pathways has aimed to capture and document these innovations and lessons learnt as both a legacy of the CORE programme and a practical resource for future research initiatives.

References
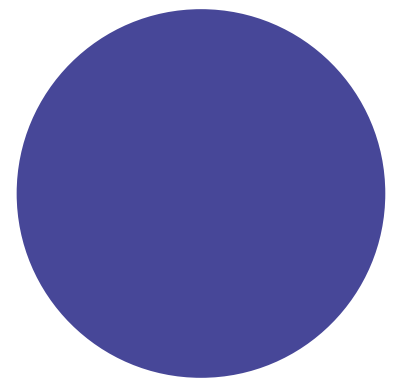
Bolton, L. and Georgalakis, J. (2022) *The Socioeconomic Impact of Covid-19 in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, CORE Synthesis Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2022.007

Clark, L. and Apgar, J.M. (2019) *Unpacking the Impact of International Development: Resource Guide 2. Seven Steps to a Theory of Change*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, University of Edinburgh, and Centre for Development Impact

Clark, L.; Carpenter, J. and Taylor, J. (2022) *Learning From Responsiveness to a Rapidly Evolving Context: IDRC's Covid-19 Responses for Equity Programme*, CORE Learning Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2022.004

Clark, L.; Higdon, G.L.; Thompson, S.; Tofaris, E. and Rose, P. (2021) *Celebrating the Impact of the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Programme*, Working Paper: Expert Analysis from the Impact Initiative, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies and The Impact Initiative, DOI: 10.35648/20.500.12413/11781/ii370

Georgalakis, J. and Rose, P. (2019) 'Introduction: Identifying the Qualities of Research–Policy Partnerships in International Development – A New Analytical Framework', *IDS Bulletin* 50.1, DOI: 10.19088/1968-2019.103

Mayne, J. (2018) 'Developing and Using Useful Theories of Change', *Evergreen Briefing Note* (accessed 2 October 2023)

Oliver, K.; Lorenc, T. and Innvær, S. (2014) 'New Directions in Evidence-Based Policy Research: A Critical Analysis of the Literature', *Health Research Policy and Systems* 12: 34, DOI: 10.1186/1478-4505-12-34

Taylor, J.; Quak, E.J.; Georgalakis, J. and Clark, L. (2022) *Pathways to Impact in the Pandemic: A Rapid Review of Covid-19-Related Research Engagement Strategies in Low- And Middle-Income Country Settings*, Covid Collective Helpdesk Report 10, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CC.2022.003

Weiss, C.H. (1979) 'The Many Meanings of Research Utilization', *Public Administration Review* 3.95: 426–31, DOI: 10.2307/3109916
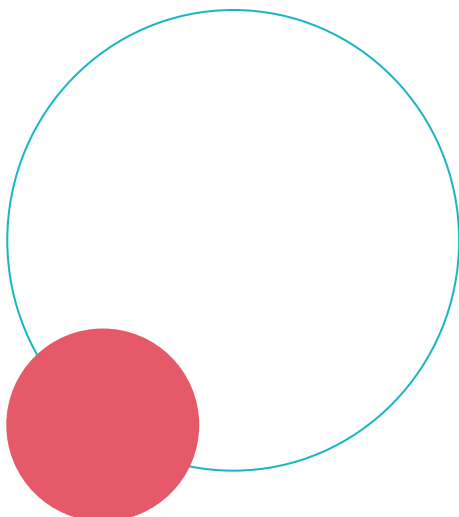
Project outputs listed in the report

Ahmed, S.; Ahmed, V.; Alain, M. and Gatellier, K. (2022) *Improving the Fiscal Policy Response to Covid-19 in Pakistan*, CORE Stories of Change, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2022.003

Al Shami, F. (2023) 'Arab Region Social Protection Systems: Research and Policy Design Challenges', *IDS Bulletin* 54.2: 109–30, DOI: 10.19088/1968-2023.135

Bianchi, M.; Coda, F.; Cyr, J.; Heffernan, I. and Meeker, J. (2023) *Effective Governance Responses to Crises: Lessons From the Covid-19 Pandemic*, CORE Research for Policy and Practice Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2023.011

Bolton, L. and Georgalakis, J. (2022) *The Socioeconomic Impact of Covid-19 in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, CORE Synthesis Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2022.007

Cyr, J.; Bianchi, M.; Lara, I.F. and Coda, F. (2023) '(Re-)Thinking a Collaborative Research Model After Covid-19: Introducing Colabora.Lat', *IDS Bulletin* 54.2: 197–208, DOI: 10.19088/1968-2023.140

Esquivel, V. *et al.* (2022) *Why Covid-19 Recovery Must be Gender-Responsive*, CORE Research for Policy and Practice Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2022.001

Fort, R. and Alcázar, L. (2023) 'Resilience in the Time of a Pandemic: Developing Public Policies for *Ollas Comunes* in Peru', *IDS Bulletin* 54.2: 165–80, DOI: 10.19088/1968-2023.138

Fort, R. and Gatellier, K. (2022) *Building Safer and More Sustainable Food Systems in Peru*, CORE Stories of Change, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2022.005

Galpaya, H.; Hurulle, G. and Gunawardana, D. (2023) 'Policy Influence in Crisis: Reflections from a Southern Thinktank', *IDS Bulletin* 54.2: 75–92, DOI: 10.19088/1968-2023.133

Mabugu, R.E.; Maisonnave, H.; Henseler, M.; Chitiga-Mabugu, M. and Makochekanwa, A. (2023) 'Co-Modelling for Relief and Recovery from the Covid-19 Crisis in Zimbabwe', *IDS Bulletin* 54.2: 41–58, DOI: 10.19088/1968-2023.131

Niño Eslava, D. and Gatellier, K. (2022) *Collective Action to Support Family Farming in Colombia*, CORE Stories of Change, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2022.013

Suleri, A.Q. *et al.* (2022) *Strengthening Food Security in Pakistan During the Covid-19 Pandemic*, CORE Stories of Change, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2022.008

Thompson, J. *et al.* (2021) *The Impact of Covid-19 on Livelihoods and Food Security*, CORE Research for Policy and Practice Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2021.001

Vyas, A.; Banerjee, P.; Achyut, P. and Wilson, E. (2023) *Fostering Gender Diversity and Inclusiveness in Street Vendor Associations in India*, CORE Stories of Change, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CORE.2023.001

About this report

This output was published by the CORE Knowledge Translation Programme, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), which supports the translation of knowledge emerging from the CORE initiative. Supported by the International Development Research Centre, CORE brings together 20 projects to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery. The research is being led primarily by local researchers, universities, thinktanks, and civil society organisations across 42 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.