

Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Fogera Plain, Ethiopia

COVID-19 Country Report 2 - December 2020

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Introduction

This report presents an assessment of the changes in effects of COVID-19 on agricultural commercialisation, food and nutrition security, labour and employment, and poverty and well-being in rural Ethiopia by comparing the results of a baseline household survey (R1) in late June 2020 with a follow-up survey (R2) in late October 2020. Data was collected from a stratified random sample of 106 smallholder rice farmer households (24 female and 82 male-headed) in five *kebeles* (villages) in the Fogera Plain area of Amhara Region. Data was also collected through 25 key informant interviews conducted in the *kebeles*.

Context

As of October 31, Ethiopia reported 96,169 confirmed COVID-19 cases.¹ The number of deaths totalled 1,464. Responding to the pandemic has been challenging, but other crises, including desert locust infestation, devastating floods, and the recent conflict with the regional state government in Tigray, have required more political action and drawn greater public attention. The reduced focus on COVID-19 has been seen in terms of less media coverage and relaxation of enforcement regulations, particularly after the state of emergency was lifted on 26 August 2020. Public transport is now at full capacity (with mandatory use of masks), schools have partially opened, and some meetings can be held.

“One of the preventive measures against COVID-19 is sanitation. But, we don’t have access to potable water even to drink in our kebele and the possibility of buying and using sanitisers is very low. The issue of ensuring access to potable water needs to be seriously considered.” – A member of kebele administration, Dera District, South Gondar Zone

Health and disease

All R2 respondents said that they were aware of COVID-19, and the government guidelines put in place to control its spread. However, as in R1, many stated that they did not respect many of them. The number of respondents hearing about confirmed COVID-19 cases declined from 16% to 10% in the district, in line with official reports of confirmed cases at country level.

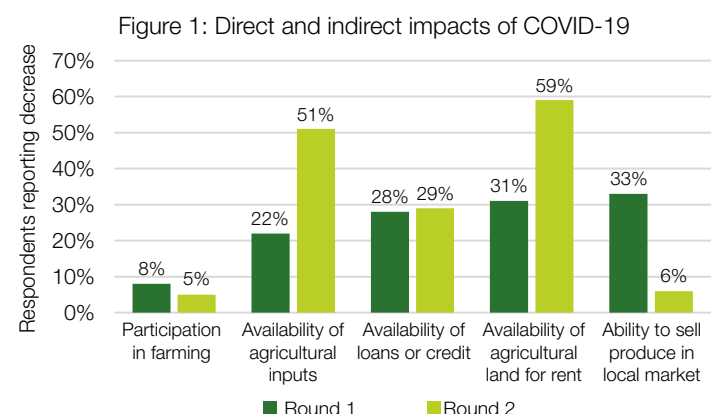
Farming, labour and marketing

Well over 90% of respondents participated in normal farming activities over the last three months. The number reporting a decline in availability of agricultural land for rent increased from about 31% to 58%. The decline in availability of agricultural inputs was reported by more than 50% of

Key findings

- Respondents were aware of COVID-19 threats and the prevention guidelines during and after the declared state of emergency to fight the pandemic.
- Many respondents remained sceptical about the seriousness of the outbreak and compliance with government guidelines continued to be very limited.
- Agricultural activities continued to be minimally affected, whereas devastating floods emerged as a serious challenge, causing major disruption and displacement.
- Respondents reporting a decline in the availability of agricultural inputs surged from 22% to 51%.
- Ability to sell produce in local markets improved as the proportion of respondents citing a decline fell from 33% to 6%, implying improvements as trading and movement restrictions were relaxed.
- The proportion of respondents reporting reduced availability of different food items rose starkly over the two periods from 11% to 43% for grains, 20% to 46% for pulses, 10% to 40% for dairy products, and from 7% to 51% for vegetable.
- The proportion of respondents with worries about not having enough food to eat decreased from 64% to 40%, and inability to eat nutritious food from 42% to 35% from R1 to R2; this was associated with emergency assistance provided in relation to a flood disaster in the Fogera plain.

respondents (22% in R1), while 74% said they experienced an increase in agricultural input prices (compared to 71% in R1). Respondents reported improved ability to sell produce in local markets. A decline in availability of loans/credit from banks/financial institutions since the start of the crisis was reported by 28%, a similar figure to R1.



Availability of services for agricultural production

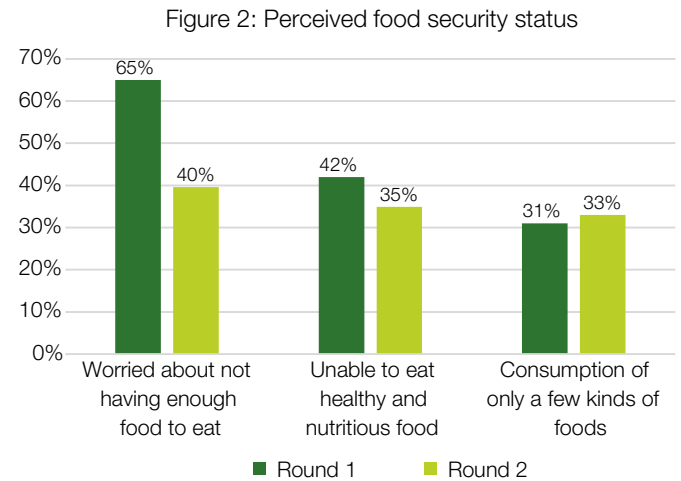
The proportion of respondents reporting problems with availability of extension services declined from about 34% (R1) to 22% (R2). This is associated with the relaxation of movement restrictions for extension workers in rural areas, including Fogera.

Food and nutrition security

Responses to food availability showed no major differences between male- and female-headed households:

- More than 50% of respondents reported no change in food availability in both R1 and R2. However, many noted problems with the availability of food products in R2 important to local diets, including grains (43%); pulses (46%); dairy (40%); and vegetables (51%).
- The proportion of respondents worried about not having enough food to eat decreased from 64% to 40%. Those who expressed concerns about their inability to eat healthy and nutritious food declined from 42% to 35%.
- Improvements in perceived nutritional security was associated with emergency assistance provided in response to floods in the Fogera plain (three of the five survey *kebeles* were seriously affected).

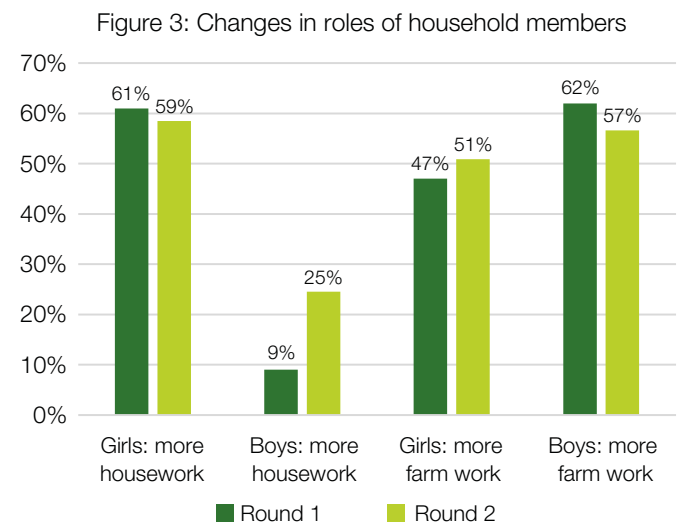
- There were differences between male- and female-headed households in the different indicators of perceived nutritional security due to COVID-19.



Responses to the threat of COVID-19

Overall, there were no major differences in the responses of female- and male-headed households to perceived COVID-19 threats during both surveys:

- Respondents describing reduced mobility within and outside their villages decreased from 52% to 38% and 71% to 56%, respectively, from R1 to R2.
- Reports of a decline in the number of buyers/traders coming to the village was about the same, 13% in R1; 14% in R2.
- 59% of respondents reported girls taking on more housework and care responsibilities, while 57% stated boys had more farm work in R2, which was the same as R1.



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