



Agricultural Policy Research in Africa



COVID-19: APRA'S CONTRIBUTION TO UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS IN RURAL AFRICA

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ACRONYMS

ALRE	Accompanied Learning for Relevance and Effectiveness
APRA	Agricultural Policy Research in Africa
CASA	Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness
FAC	Future Agricultures Consortium
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
ICE	Information, Communication and Engagement
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
NGO	non-governmental organisation
RMS	Rapid Market Survey
SPEAR	Supporting Policies, Programmes and Enabling Action through Research

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 initiated a remarkable pivot within APRA in which a new COVID focussed research programme was rapidly designed, approved and launched. The first APRA COVID-19 blogs appeared in April 2020, a comprehensive synthesis of existing learning on epidemics was published in May, and the first of three rounds of an eight-country, 800-farmer multi-phase survey, was completed in July. Over a period of two years 33 publications, 77 blogs, extensive social media, numerous in-country seminars and one international e-Dialogue were used to communicate the findings. The publications were downloaded over 10,000 times and the blogs over 16,000 times with coverage in national newspapers in most of the focus countries.

This was achieved to a large extent within the existing budget of the APRA programme, while still meeting the output targets of the original programme. On top of this, the programme managed to absorb a 22 per cent budget cut over its final 18 months due to Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) aid cuts.

The focus of the research was on the effect of both the pandemic and related restrictions on the wellbeing of rural smallholders, women, youth, food systems and selected agricultural value chains. The blogs in particular highlighted the unintended consequences of lockdowns and gave an important voice to rural communities. The multi-phase assessment provided an important evidence resource for future learning.

It is challenging to assess the contribution of the APRA COVID-19 pivot to emerging understanding and policy decisions in the first two years of the pandemic. There are a few examples of explicit influence, but in the most cases APRA made a contribution alongside other sources. The number and range of issues covered by APRA blogs and publications, combined with the significant download numbers and feedback from communication events, does suggest both a demand for the information and some probable influencing outcomes. Internet searches of the topics covered by the pivot readily produce APRA outputs which suggests they are available and relevant.

Overall APRA has contributed significant additional evidence and analysis during the first two years of the pandemic on the effect of the COVID-19 virus, and the measures being taken to control it, on rural agricultural communities. The extra work required to deliver the COVID-19 pivot was achieved through extra effort and savings, and although there were some consequences for the existing APRA research, these were outweighed overall by the benefits of the pivot. There have been some lessons from pivot implementation:

Lesson 1 – When publishing research results such as those from a multi-phase assessment, careful thought is needed about the summarising of the results, and the placement within the report summaries of ‘findings’, ‘policy implications’ and, where appropriate, ‘recommendations’. This may be particularly important for ensuring appropriate information is easily accessible to policymakers. There is a danger of valuable policy implications being buried in a conclusion at the end.

Lesson 2 – A key opportunity of a diverse and multi-disciplinary programme like APRA is to achieve synergy between the different Work Streams and geographical teams. Contracting timetables, intra-disciplinary links, geography and restrictions on meeting due to COVID-19 can all encourage siloed outputs. The time, energy and effort needed to deliver maximum synergy needs to be planned and monitored. There may be a role for a synergy champion.

Lesson 3 – With a rapidly emerging crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, the value of information for decision-makers is closely related to its timeliness. Blogs promoted through social media proved an ideal medium for rapidly sharing emerging research findings, qualitative observation from field experiences, and challenging opinions.

Lesson 4 – A research programme like the COVID-19 pivot seems likely to make a contribution to knowledge and policy alongside many other sources of evidence. Timely communication of the evidence using multiple complementary channels like social media, blogs, newspaper articles, seminars, on-line events, summaries, and more formal academic publications,

all have a role and are likely to be mutually reinforcing. This needs adequate planning and resourcing.

Lesson 5 – It can be possible to deliver more for the same budget within a programme like APRA, particularly during an international crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic when motivation to contribute more to vital evidence is high. Synergy and goodwill can be exploited to deliver more. However, there are limits: human capacity can become exhausted, and quality may become compromised. This is an issue that needs careful consideration by both funder and contractor.

Lesson 6 – The COVID-19 multi-phase assessment data is a rich source of data for future analysis, including possible extension of the panel for future data rounds by APRA researchers and others. Future access to raw data and issues of confidentiality need to be considered.

1 APRA CONTRIBUTION TO COVID-19 KNOWLEDGE



The evaluation question is:

Did APRA contribute significant additional evidence and analysis on the effect of the COVID-19 virus, and the measures being taken to control it, on rural agricultural communities during the first two years of the pandemic, and to what effect?

To assess this, we need to consider a number of sub-questions:

1. What evidence was produced and when?
2. How was the APRA evidence additional and/or different from that which was already available?
3. How was this evidence communicated and accessed?
4. Did the evidence contribute to any policy or practice change?
5. Will the evidence contribute to any longer-term learning on addressing future pandemics or other emergencies?
6. Were there any unintended consequences of this APRA intervention?

2 CONTEXT FOR THE CHANGE



When the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the World in early 2020, initial evidence of outcomes came from China, Europe and USA, with these countries' relatively well-resourced health services being inundated with critically ill patients. Governments and health authorities were having to make decisions with limited knowledge in a rapidly-changing context.

There was understandably massive concern about what would happen in Africa when COVID-19 moved from initial individual cases in cities to wider populations, and particularly rural areas with their already weak intensive care capacities. African governments, faced with a massive threat and little evidence to rely on reacted in a variety of ways. Many governments imposed lockdowns with different degrees of severity, often with little or no complementary support to the most vulnerable affected by the restrictions. In some cases, the lockdown was challenged in court, successfully in the case of Malawi. In other cases, the government, for example in Tanzania, had a more pandemic-sceptical approach, imposing much more limited restrictions.

At the start of the pandemic, APRA identified that it might be able to contribute to rapidly filling the evidence gap, particularly in relation to rural areas and the agricultural economy. APRA had already been involved in surveying aspects of the rural economy in six countries and, by forming additional partnerships, had the contact phone numbers of rural interviewees in eight countries. APRA had also already identified and trained experienced teams of interviewers and had analytical capacity.

Following extensive discussions with FCDO, APRA was granted approval to pivot its research to focus on three urgent activities related to COVID-19. These complementary efforts were supported from APRA's existing programme budget, based on savings made in several areas (e.g. travel, events, etc.). These savings and reallocations ensured that the programme would not only be able to deliver on its original commitments, but also respond to the unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic. The activities were:

- 1. Evidence review of policy interventions to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 on poverty, agriculture and food security from disease outbreaks and other crises.**

The review was conducted jointly with the FCDO-funded, 'Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises' programme. It addressed two key questions: what may be the consequences of disease, and responses to it, on agriculture, rural livelihoods, food systems and food security, and what lessons on dealing with those consequences may be drawn from previous crises? The [final 172-page report](#), which was widely disseminated within DFID/FCDO, was designed both to assist UK decision-makers at an early stage of the pandemic to prioritise and contextualise their COVID-19 response activities, and to be a source of information to the wider community.

- 2. Multi-phase assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on food systems and rural livelihoods in Africa.**

This assessment was designed to provide real-time insights into how the crisis was affecting local food systems and livelihoods in eight African countries, focusing on local communities and farming contexts where APRA and partners had engaged in long-term research. Combining a quantitative household survey (N=800+) and qualitative key informant interviews with local officials and other knowledgeable professionals (N=65+), APRA built a unique, multi-country panel that provided policy-relevant insights for decision-makers. APRA researchers successfully completed two rounds of research during 2020 and a third in early 2021. [Results from each round](#) were published as a series of Country Reports and a Synthesis Report; they were shared with FCDO Country and Regional Offices, the African Union Commission and other national and regional actors. They also attracted the attention of national press in several of the study countries. Webinars further publicised the results after the Round 3 results were publicly available. As part of this research, APRA collaborated

with the ‘Supporting Policies, Programmes and Enabling Action through Research’ (SPEAR) flagship of the Agriculture for Nutrition and Health Program at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). IFPRI helped define the food and nutrition-related questions included in the survey and assisted with the analysis of the qualitative data. Additional life history interviews were conducted in selected households in Malawi and Nigeria, and these combined with a further literature review resulted in a joint APRA-SPEAR output examining the impact of COVID-19 on nutrition security and equity issues.¹

- 3. Case studies on the impact of COVID-19 on agricultural value chains in Africa.** APRA research teams conducted studies on the political economy of agricultural value chains in six countries (Ethiopia rice, Ghana oil palm and cocoa, Malawi groundnuts, Nigeria maize, cocoa and rice, Tanzania rice and sunflower, and Zimbabwe tobacco and maize), which was part of the planned programme for 2020. Following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the teams added new lines of inquiry to assess the impact of crisis on those value chains. During the same period, APRA collaborated with the FCDO-funded ‘Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness’ (CASA) programme to design and implement a complementary Rapid Market Survey (RMS) to analyse how COVID-19 was affecting access to markets and financial services for small and medium-scale agricultural enterprises involved in those chains. CASA contributed to the design of the RMS and provided some resources to extend the value chains studies, with APRA sharing data and contacts from the research.

1 Salm, L., Nisbett, N. and Lulache, A. (2022) *The Effects of COVID-19 on Food Equity and Nutrition Security in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from a Multi-Phase Assessment*. APRA COVID-19 Synthesis Report 4. Brighton: Future Agricultures Consortium. <https://doi.org/10.19088/APRA.2022.012>.

3 APRA COVID-19 EVIDENCE OUTPUTS

APRA, sometimes in conjunction with its other partners, produce a significant volume of published evidence and analysis. However, with a rapidly developing pandemic like COVID-19, timing of information and

its communication is critical. Below is a timeline of the different types of publications on COVID-19 along with their download numbers:

Table 1 – APRA COVID-19 publications (excluding blogs)

Date	Public/event	Type	Downloads ²
May 20	Rapid Evidence Review: Policy Interventions to Mitigate Negative Effects on Poverty, Agriculture and Food Security from Disease Outbreaks and Other Crises	WP	1,788
Oct 20	Rapid Assessment of the Impact of Covid-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa – Synthesis Report 1	SR	2,249
Oct 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Fogera Plain, Ethiopia – Round 1 Report	RR	96
Oct 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Ghana – Round 1 Report	RR	90
Oct 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Malawi – Round 1 Report	RR	109
Oct 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Nigeria – Round 1 Report	RR	514
Oct 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Tanzania – Round 1 Report	RR	143
Oct 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Zimbabwe – Round 1 Report	RR	191
Oct 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Kenya – Round 1 Report	RR	88
Dec 20	The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Africa - webinar	P	0
Dec 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Fogera Plain, Ethiopia – Round 2 Report	RR	123
Dec 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Ghana – Round 2 Report	RR	231
Dec 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Malawi – Round 2 Report	RR	84
Dec 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Nigeria – Round 2 Report	RR	141
Dec 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Tanzania – Round 2 Report	RR	247
Dec 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Zimbabwe – Round 2 Report	RR	79
Dec 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Kenya – Round 2 Report	RR	n/a
Dec 20	Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Zambia – Round 2 Report	RR	n/a
Jan 21	Rapid Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa – Synthesis Report 2	SR	235
Mar 21	APRA Working Paper 51: The Political Economy of the Rice Value Chain in Ethiopia: Actors, Performance, and Discourses	WP	417

2 Downloads from OpenDocs up to the end of March 2022. These figures are discussed further in Section 4

Date	Public/event	Type	Downloads ²
Mar 21	Working Paper 55: COVID-19 and the political economy of tobacco and maize commodity circuits: Makoronyera, the 'connected' and agrarian accumulation in Zimbabwe	WP	90
Mar 21	APRA Working Paper 49: The Political Economy of Sunflower in Tanzania: A Case of Singida Region	WP	1,360
Mar 21	APRA Working Paper 52: Agricultural Commercialisation and the Political Economy of Cocoa and Rice Value Chains in Nigeria	WP	1,155
Mar 21	APRA Working Paper 56: The Political Economy of the Groundnut Value Chain in Malawi: Its Re-emergence Amidst Policy Chaos, Strategic Neglect, and Opportunism	WP	181
Mar 21	APRA Working Paper 57: Agricultural Commercialisation and the Political Economy of Value Chains: Tanzania Rice Case Study	WP	110
Apr 21	APRA Research Note: The COVID-19 Pandemic and Household Rice Consumption Patterns in Ethiopia: The Case of Addis Ababa	WP	118
Jul 21	APRA Working Paper 60: The Political Economy of the Maize Value Chain in Nigeria	WP	50
Sep 21	APRA Working Paper 69: Politics, Power and Social Differentiation in African Agricultural Value Chains: The Effects of COVID-19	WP	89
Nov 21	APRA Brief 28: COVID-19 and Social Differentiation in African Agriculture	B	51
Nov 21	Presentation by APRA on "Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on food systems and livelihoods" on FCDO/COVID Collective conference in Malawi	P	0
Nov 21	A Multi-Phase Assessment of the Effects of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Zimbabwe	RR	284
Nov 21	A Multi-Phase Assessment of the Effects of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Ethiopia: The Case of Fogera Plain	RR	53
Nov 21	A Multi-Phase Assessment of the Effects of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Malawi	RR	63
Dec 21	A Multi-Phase Assessment of the Effects of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Kenya	RR	79
Dec 21	A Multi-Phase Assessment of the Effects of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Ghana	RR	88
Dec 21	A Multi-Phase Assessment of the Effects of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Nigeria	RR	69
Dec 21	A Multi-Phase Assessment of the Effects of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Tanzania	RR	51
Dec 21	A Multi-Phase Assessment of the Effects of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in Zambia	RR	45
2022	A Multi-Phase Assessment of the Effects of COVID-19 on Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa. APRA COVID-19 Synthesis Report 3	SR	n/a ³
Mar 22	The Effects of COVID-19 on Food Equity and Nutrition Security in sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from a Multi-Phase Assessment	SR	n/a
	Total		10,761

RR	Research report
WP	Working paper
P	Presentation
B	Brief
SR	Synthesis report

It is impressive how quickly APRA managed to pivot to produce additional evidence about the effects of COVID-19. The total quantity of published material related to COVID-19 is extraordinary which is a testament to the flexibility and hard-work of the field teams and back-office editors and support staff. It is

remarkable that this was achieved at short notice and within existing budgets.

The Rapid Evidence Review published in May 2020 was an important contribution to the knowledge available at the time and this is reflected in the number of downloads.

3 The last two synthesis reports had not been released at the time of writing.

The review identified early on the risk that ‘the economic consequences of measures to control the disease may be stronger than those of disease itself and in responses to medical crises, livelihoods have often been ignored, especially when it comes to informal activities — as is much smallholder farming, trading, and the interactions of rural and urban economies.’ The general lessons and recommendations remain appropriate, even with the benefit of 2022 knowledge and hindsight. The total report ran to a slightly inaccessible 172 pages, however there was a clear executive summary (2pp) and summary (8pp), as well as an informative blog, which was downloaded in significant numbers. Perhaps there could have been a separate policy brief to supply the need for headline evidence of unintended consequences of policy responses in the early stages of the pandemic.

In October 2020, APRA published the results of the first round of surveys conducted in June–July 2020 both as country papers and a multi-country synthesis. This was fast for this type of work, but also illustrated the challenges of a rapidly changing situation, with decision-makers most interested in the situation ‘now’ rather than three months previously. By October 2020, the situation had already moved-on. To an extent, the blogs were an opportunity to get some of the ideas out more rapidly (Figure 1).

The country research reports clearly articulated ‘key findings’ which were helpful, but they varied to the extent that they articulated the policy implications or policy recommendations associated with the findings. The phase 1 synthesis report did have a box labelled ‘recommendations’ which were more like key findings; but otherwise had little focus on policy implications or recommendations. It would have been helpful to have a greater emphasis on interpreting the findings, perhaps presenting these as ‘policy implications’ even if it was felt that there was insufficient evidence at this stage to provide ‘recommendations’. This would have added value to the reports and made them less time dependent.

The results of the second round survey conducted in October 2020 were published in December 2020. A significant range and quantity of additional data was presented and analysed. There were some good quotes which presented a qualitative picture on what was happening in these rural areas, however more use could have been made of qualitative information to explain the reasons for some of the findings described, which could

then have provided the opportunity to suggest policy orientated implications of the findings.

The third round survey was undertaken in February 2021 and the country assessments were published in November/December 2021. These were longer fuller reports, with lots of valuable information, but still very ‘finding’ orientated with little explanations of why these outcomes seem to be occurring and also little in the way of policy implications. The participant quotes provide a richness that isn’t really made best use of in the summary findings tables, which lack a cause-and-effect explanation. This round of reports do, however, have some policy suggestions in the conclusions, but these are not evident in the findings box at the start of each report. The overall synthesis report has not yet been published and may provide an opportunity to highlight more of the policy implications of this important work.

The separate report building on more qualitative evidence entitled ‘*Effects of COVID-19 on Food Equity and Nutrition Security in sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from a Multi-Phase Assessment*’ is an important compilation of experience. This was prepared by colleagues in the SPEAR flagship of the IFPRI-led Agriculture for Nutrition and Health programme, using the key informant interview data from Rounds 1-3 of the APRA Rapid Assessments. Originally, the SPEAR team intended to work with APRA to provide a small amount of funding to support additional qualitative research on nutrition and equity issues in the eight countries if FCDO approved a fourth round of research. However, this was not approved due to the FCDO budget cuts, and SPEAR and APRA decided to focus lessons on two countries with high levels of food and nutrition insecurity, Malawi and Nigeria, drawing on the existing qualitative data from the APRA key informant interviews done in Rounds 1-3, as well as relevant secondary literature. The main findings from this synthesis were presented in a box at the start of the report⁴:

- *COVID-19 interventions have negatively affected people’s ability to access food resources and make adequate nutritional choices, with both immediate and potential long-term effects.*
- *The disruptions to livelihoods and daily life created by the pandemic pose greater challenges for people who were already exposed to drivers of inequity and insecurity, thereby deepening pre-existing vulnerabilities.*

4 Salm, L., Nisbett, N. and Lulache, A. (2022) *The Effects of COVID-19 on Food Equity and Nutrition Security in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from a Multi-Phase Assessment*. APRA COVID-19 Synthesis Report 4. Brighton: Future Agricultures Consortium. <https://doi.org/10.19088/APRA.2022.012>.

- Initial barriers to movement and trade led to job loss, revenue losses, disruptions to labour supply and agricultural inputs. These changes were experienced more severely by temporary and landless labourers, informal workers, and smallholder farmers, and affected their ability to grow and access food.
- *Women are also more likely to be affected due to higher participation in the informal economy and a disproportionate care burden for children and other family members, which was worsened by some of the COVID-19 measures such as school closures.*
- *Smallholder farmers were more affected by the disruption in agricultural extension service delivery and fluctuations in demand and prices for their produce, as compared to large and established agricultural holdings. While domestic markets have opened, cross-border trade limitations persist and are reported to have the biggest impact on farmers' abilities to sell their produce and to obtain the necessary agricultural inputs, primarily fertiliser and pesticide. This has reverberations across the food supply chain, affecting traders, informal labourers, and agricultural producers, diminishing their incomes and their subsequent ability to afford healthy food choices.*
- *The unaffordability of food, due to reduced incomes and work opportunities, has been the main cause for rising food insecurity, as opposed to the unavailability of food at the market. This is compounded by rising food prices.*
- *Food of high nutritional quality such as fruits and vegetables were among the most inaccessible during restrictions due to their perishability. Consumption of these foods reduced in some instances, with implications for diet quality, particularly those in precarious financial situations.*
- *School closures are likely to affect the development of girls more than that of boys, as girls are more at risk of forced school abandonment. This has potential long-term implications throughout their life-course.*

The policy implications of this research was more evident in the conclusion at the end, a key part of which is shown here⁵:

The restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as lockdowns of business and

services, mobility restrictions, the closure of schools and physical distancing, had an immediate and direct impact on livelihoods and daily life, including people's employment and income situation. The pandemic has led to job loss, an increased supply of farm labourers in the context of reduced demand, higher household expenditures due to migration from cities to villages and children being out of school. Agricultural production was disrupted due to reduced availability of labour and inputs such as seeds, fertiliser and machinery. Opportunities to trade agricultural produce were greatly reduced by national border closures, limiting access to markets to sell and buy goods, buyers not coming to villages to purchase produce, movement restrictions that were both institutionally mandated and self-imposed, as well as an increased price for transport.

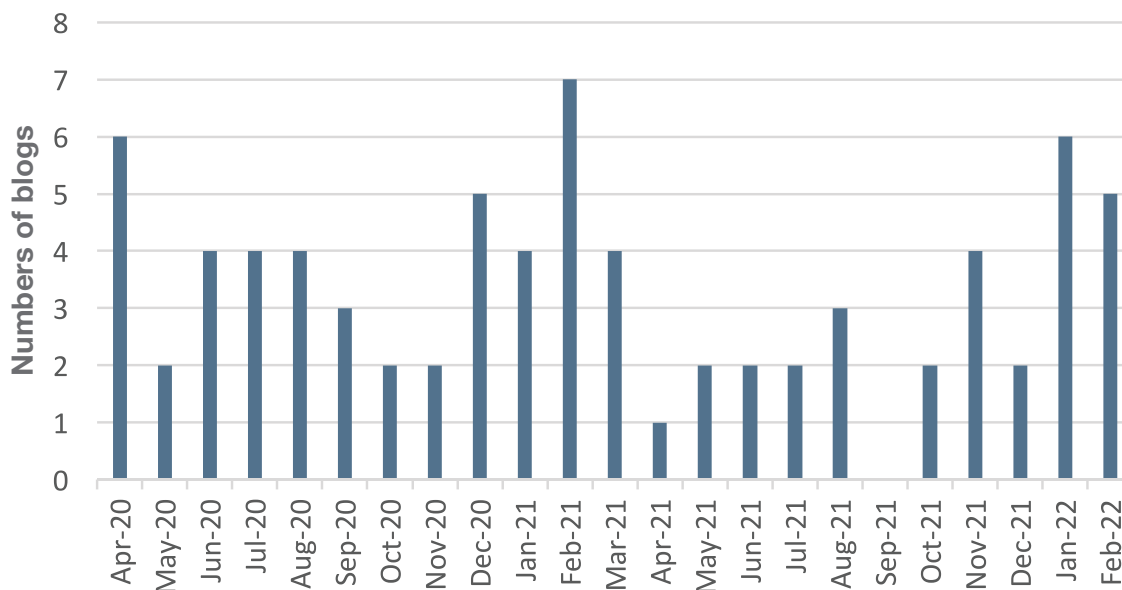
These restrictions, in turn, have had an indirect impact on factors which affect food and nutrition security, such as accessibility to adequate quantities and quality of foods (influenced by higher prices, reduced purchasing power of food, availability and diversity of foods at the market), access to health services (due to temporary closing of facilities, or fear of attending) and increased care burdens (due to having more family members at home, increased household chores for girls at home, and caring for the ill).

In addition to the results of the multi-phase assessments, a series of value chain specific political economy working papers were published in March–September 2021, which used separate value chain evidence collection. These reports all included a valuable analysis on the effect of the pandemic on each value chain even though this wasn't always the main focus. These working papers contained useful additional information and political economy orientated analysis on COVID-19 within specific value chains of interest to APRA, however the emerging findings from the multi-phase assessments were not integrated or referenced. These findings could have provided a more holistic overall picture of different actors in the value chain, including crucially the smallholder farmers, and may have been a slightly missed opportunity for different parts of APRA to deliver synergy by working across workstreams.

The APRA COVID-19 publication output was complemented by a rich supply of blogs reporting on the less heard stories of what was happening in rural areas and the effect of COVID-19 restrictions on rural livelihoods and wellbeing. The first APRA COVID-19

5 Salm, L., Nisbett, N. and Lulache, A. (2022) *The Effects of COVID-19 on Food Equity and Nutrition Security in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from a Multi-Phase Assessment*. APRA COVID-19 Synthesis Report 4. Brighton: Future Agricultures Consortium. <https://doi.org/10.19088/APRA.2022.012>.

Figure 1 - APRA blogs published on COVID-19



blog was produced impressively early in the pandemic on 2 April 2020, focussing on social resilience, followed by one on 6 April focussing on lessons from how pastoralists deal with uncertainty, followed by others dealing with the effect of lockdowns on farmers. It is interesting to note that the first COVID-19 blogs were published six months before the first round of multi-phase assessment reports. The availability of each new blog was publicised very rapidly through social media.

In total an amazing collection of 77 COVID-19 blogs were written, often with very up-to-date information and covering a wide range of opinions and topics, with a very clear focus on the effects of both COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions on the economy and well-being of rural Africans. The importance of the intersecting vulnerabilities faced by many rural households due to insecure livelihoods and other inequities, and the role of COVID-19 responses in exacerbating social differentiation, were common themes. Ian Scoones and the Zimbabwe team were particularly prolific and reported views less often heard, which were often taken up in the mainstream media.

Lesson 1 – When publishing research results such as those from a multi-phase assessment, careful thought is needed about the summarising of the results, and the placement within the report summaries of ‘findings’, ‘policy implications’ and, where appropriate, ‘recommendations’. This may be particularly important for ensuring appropriate information is easily accessible to policymakers. There is a danger of valuable policy implications being buried in a conclusion at the end.

Lesson 2 – A key opportunity of a diverse and multi-disciplinary programme like APRA is to achieve synergy between the different Work Streams and geographical teams. Contracting timetables, intra-disciplinary links, geography and restrictions on meeting due to COVID-19 can all encourage siloed outputs. The time, energy and effort needed to deliver maximum synergy needs to be planned and monitored. There may be a role for a synergy champion.

4 ACCESS AND UPTAKE OF APRA COVID-19 OUTPUTS



All outputs from the COVID-19 APRA pivot are posted on a dedicated [COVID-19 webpage](#) on the APRA/Future Agricultures website and are flagged on the homepage – which makes them very accessible. Readership of the publications and blogs were also promoted through social media.

The download figures for the 33 APRA COVID-19 publications (excluding blogs) were given in Table 1. This shows a remarkable 11,000 downloads and in particular very high download numbers for the very timely early publications of the Rapid Evidence Review in May 2020 (1,788 downloads) and the synthesis of the first round of the food systems and rural livelihood multi-phase assessments in October 2020 (2,249 downloads). The individual country reports from Round 1 and Round 2 also had significant downloads.

The final round of country reports from the multi-phase assessments included more overall analysis of possible effects of the pandemic and accompanying lockdowns and lessons learnt. They have been relatively recently published so it is difficult to gauge the likely download numbers. The final cross-country synthesis may be particularly useful in relation to lessons learnt, but in March 2022 had not yet been published.

APRA’s particular added value was looking at the wider wellbeing and rural livelihood outcomes from the pandemic, and this focus was well reflected in most of the blogs. It was also appreciated by the readership, with the most commonly downloaded blogs featuring the unintended consequences of government policy to the pandemic, as illustrated by the top blogs. It is

noteworthy that these most-read blogs were published early in the response to the pandemic. This, combined with the significant number of readers, makes it likely that they helped to frame national narratives in a time of great uncertainty. Overall, there were well over 16,000 views of the APRA COVID-19 blogs as shown in Table 2:

Social media engagement with some of the COVID blogs has been remarkable. The recent January 2022 blog *Hard pressed but not crushed: A story of resilience and adaptation to COVID in Ghana*, which benefitted from a paid boost, received 28 retweets, three quote tweets and 773 likes

There have also been a number of on-line events in which APRA COVID-19 evidence has been presented. On 11 November 2021, FCDO hosted an online event on ‘COVID-19 and poverty: informing economic and social policy in Malawi’ on behalf of the Covid Collective, which is coordinated by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Two of the four presentations were by APRA researchers:

- Social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the poorest and those at risk of impoverishment and the policies needed to mitigate them by *Blessings Chinsinga, Professor at Chancellor College, University of Malawi*
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food systems and livelihoods by *Miriam Matita, Lecturer, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources*

Table 2 – Titles and downloads of the APRA COVID-19 blogs

Spot	Views	Title	Date
1	2,122	The unintended consequences of COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria	Sep 20
2	1,517	Zimbabwe’s COVID-19 lockdown – ensuring the right to food for the poor	Apr 20
3	1,066	COVID-19 lockdown in Zimbabwe – a disaster for farmers	Apr 20
4	1,004	Agricultural based livelihood implications of COVID-19 in Ghana (2)	Oct 20
5	926	COVID-19 in West Africa – the impacts for agricultural enterprises	May 20
6	758	How is COVID-19 shaping agricultural production and commodity marketing among smallholders in Zimbabwe	Sep 20

Source: Author’s own

That COVID-19 is not just a health issue but an economic issue as well was recognised in the plenary discussions. Participants were encouraged to check the COVID-19 recovery plan of the national planning commission, with focus areas including health, education, social services, labour, markets and macroeconomic issues.

In Kenya, the APRA findings were presented in a keynote address on 'Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on smallholder farmers' livelihoods: Response measures and policy lessons" at a webinar on Adaptations in Agricultural Training and Value Chain Practices in response to COVID-19 Pandemic Disruptions, organised by the University of Nairobi, and also at a conference at Laikipia University.

In Ghana, evidence presented at APRA dissemination workshops and postings on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn were widely circulated by national online media platforms including *Ghanaweb*, *Ghana News Agency*, *Graphic online*, and *the Business & Financial Times*.

On 9 February 2022, APRA worked in partnership with Foresight4Food and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network to host an international 'e-Dialogue on the Effects of COVID-19 on Local Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa', at which some of the findings from the APRA COVID-19 research were presented. Over 200 people attended, mainly researchers and policymakers from or working in Africa, as well as representatives from Development Associates International, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the German development agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, the International Development Research Centre of Canada, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture and other international agricultural research centres, and the United States Agency for International Development. During the dialogue there were social media posts from Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, the UK, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The main themes from the dialogue were published the following week in a blog (see Annex 1) which shows both the breadth and depth of the issues covered and there considerable and very diverse reporting on the dialogue in various media outlets (see Annex 2).

Feedback on the E dialogue from participants was very positive, particularly the benefits of involving a broad range of participants and the opportunities for discussion.

Many thanks indeed to you for providing this very interesting opportunity for discussion! I really loved the format, which allowed meaningful exchanges! Looking forwards for more conversation on this.

Sandra Gagnon - Programme officer, International Development Research Centre, Canada

The COVID-19 e-Dialogue, which is part of a wider series co-convened by APRA on 'Towards an Equitable and Sustainable Transformation of Food Systems', illustrates well the value added by the Information, Communication and Engagement (ICE) team. There was intensive coaching of presenters and improvements suggested for their presentations in the week preceding the event. This was evident in the quality of the final output and the discussions ensuing from them. The chance to discuss robust evidence on the effect of COVID-19 on food systems and livelihoods was new to many participants and responses in the chat indicated that this was highly valued.

Considering that most people will search for COVID-19 evidence and publications on the internet, it is useful to know whether they would be likely to encounter APRA evidence at an early stage. Some relatively broad search terms were used to assess this. This also gives an indication of how crowded the APRA evidence is in relation to reports from other sources covering the similar topics. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that APRA publications appear relatively prominently using many of the search terms relevant to the APRA COVID-19 subject matter. A persistent searcher will discover APRA COVID-19 publications. However, it is quite a crowded space with a significant presence of publications from other sources. The lack of hits in relation to youth was slightly disappointing.

Overall, the download and attendance evidence suggest that large numbers of people working in the field of COVID-19 policy, agricultural livelihoods

6 Internet search using Google search engine 30/3/2022. Searches earlier in the pandemic would have given different results.

7 The lower the page number the more likely it is that the APRA publication will be seen. The ranking of the APRA publication is likely to be a combination of the number of competing publications in that topic space, the frequency of APRA publications being selected and search engine optimisation of title and key terms.

Table 3: Visibility of APRA evidence in response to different internet searches: ⁶

Search terms used	Search engine page of APRA hit ⁷
COVID-19 + Africa + agriculture	p4
Impact of COVID-19 on smallholder farmers in Africa	p4
COVID-19 + Africa + food systems	p3
COVID-19 and rural livelihoods in Africa	p1, p1, p1, p1, p3
COVID-19 and food systems in Africa	p3
COVID-19 and agriculture in Africa	p4
Effect of lockdown on African farmers	p1
Effect of lockdown on Nigerian farmers	p1, p1
Effect of COVID-19 on agriculture in Ghana	p1, p3
Effect of COVID-19 on agriculture in Tanzania	p1, p1,
Effect of COVID-19 on agriculture in Malawi	p1, p2, p2
Effect of COVID-19 on agriculture in Ethiopia	p4, p4
Effect of COVID-19 on agriculture in Zimbabwe	p1, p3
Effect of COVID on women farmers in Africa	p3, p4
Effect of COVID on youth in Africa	>p4
Effect of COVID on young farmers in Africa	>p4

and food systems in sub-Saharan Africa have been reading APRA blogs, downloading APRA evidence and attending presentations by APRA at on-line events. The limited feedback available suggests that the evidence provided is useful and additional to other evidence available. Those trying to find information on the effects of COVID-19 on rural areas are likely to find APRA evidence reasonably easily using an internet search engine.

Lesson 3 – With a rapidly emerging crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, the value of information for decision-makers is closely related to its timeliness. Blogs promoted through social media proved an ideal medium for rapidly sharing emerging research findings, qualitative observation from field experiences, and challenging opinions.

5 EXAMPLES OF POLICY OR PRACTICE CHANGE CONTRIBUTION FROM APRA EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

It has not been easy to collect evidence on the contribution made by APRA evidence to revised thinking on lockdowns, and any other changes over the last two years. In most cases policy is influenced by a wide range of factors, and in the case of COVID-19 restrictions this seems to have included changes in public mood, which is also influenced by a wide range of information sources as well as lived experience. There are however a few instances where APRA evidence seems to have made a more visible contribution.

An APRA blog posted on 28 January 2021 entitled *Perceptions and misconceptions of smallholder farmers of COVID-19 in central Malawi* highlighted that rural communities considered COVID-19 to be a disease of the urban elite which meant that they themselves did not feel at risk from the disease and were unlikely to take precautionary measures. This was picked-up by *The Nation* newspaper in a frontpage article entitled *Research exposes Covid-19 info gap*. This article sought the views of health experts and policymakers in the agriculture sector on the findings, who expressed ‘worry while admitting that such myths and misconceptions exist; hence, the need for intensified civic education to ensure a smooth fight.’ This was followed three days later by a *Sunday Times of Malawi* front page entitled *Risking it All – Govt*

pours K1bn for masks for rural population that rejects Covid-19, and a lead story, *Fears over K1bn mask fund*, which referenced ‘A perceptions and misconceptions of Smallholder Farmers on Covid-19 survey conducted by APRA... found that people feel they are not at risk of contracting the disease.’ The article mentions Minister for Civic Education and National Unity Timothy Mtambo on the need to deliver messages to rural areas and that public address vehicles were being deployed.

Later in the same year, the Government of Malawi’s *COVID-19 Socio-Economic Recovery Plan: 2021-2023* produced by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and Public Sector Reforms had a significant section on the impact of COVID-19 on the agricultural sector which made reference to the *Second Round Food Systems and Rural Livelihoods* report by APRA in two sections ⁸:

In the agricultural sector, COVID-19 contact restrictions have exposed the weaknesses of the extension services system in terms of its over-reliance on face-to-face contact and the serious shortage of extension services staff. The first wave of COVID-19 occurred in April 2020 after most agricultural activities had been undertaken. This moderated the impact of COVID-19 on the sector.



Source: © The Malawi Times, reproduced with permission

8 Government of Malawi (2021). *Malawi. COVID-19 Socio-Economic Recovery Plan: 2021-2023*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and Public Sector Reforms.

However, in a research project in rural Malawi, the Agriculture Policy Research in Africa (APRA) found that in the same year, smallholder farmers' access to extension services declined for 86% of its respondents. Due to COVID-19, field days where extension workers showcase appropriate technologies (like planting, spacing and manure application) for farmers to adopt were cancelled. This was due to the restrictions on face-to-face contact during the pandemic.

The emergence of COVID-19 in Malawi has also revealed the weakness in the marketing process of agricultural produce in terms of its over-dependence on physical contact between produce buyers and farmers due to a limited application of e-trading and ecommerce technologies. The research conducted in Malawi by APRA in 2020 also found that the COVID-19 restrictions reduced farmers' access to profitable produce markets because fewer traders visited the rural areas to purchase farm produce at competitive prices. The study found that the ability to sell produce at local markets and farm gates declined for 50% of the sampled respondents, thus reducing incomes earned by the farmers. To overcome the over-reliance on face-to-face produce marketing, the SERP advocates for enhanced support to the application of e-trading and ecommerce technologies, which can be used even during crises such as COVID-19 and any other shocks. This will also help to reduce transaction costs in the marketing of agricultural produce.

In Zimbabwe, the widely read *Zimbabwe* blog regularly carried evidence of the perceptions of COVID-19 in rural areas and the effects of the lockdowns on the economy and welfare of rural communities. Some of the blog titles were hard hitting, such as *COVID-19 lockdown in Zimbabwe – a disaster for farmers*, and some were also carried as newspaper articles in national newspapers such as, *The politics of control in Zim's Covid-19 times*, in *The Standard* in October 2021, and *Health workers on the front-line: experiences from rural Zimbabwe* in the *Zimbabwean* in February 2022. Other development partners in Zimbabwe were saying similar things and all these findings and communications contributed to the groundswell of opinion and complaints on lockdown that seems to have contributed to modifications in restrictions in the later COVID-19 waves.

Similar changes took place in Nigeria and in most states the second wave of COVID-19 was not accompanied by a severe lockdown because politicians had become

aware of the damage done to the rural economy and food supplies. This seems to have been influenced by many sources of information which included APRA blogs and research reports which have a wide readership in Nigeria.

In Tanzania, where initially there were less COVID-19 restrictions than in most other countries, the evidence from APRA on the effects of the pandemic on the rice value chain was reported in some detail in local newspapers in June 2021 (see Annex 3). However, it is difficult to assess the contribution to public understanding and policy change of any coverage like this.

A summary from APRA country teams is given in Annex 4, in which they identify some of their findings, ways in which these were communicated in-country, and possible contributions to changes in understanding and/or policy. There are some suggestions of contribution, but it is difficult to evidence, and in some cases it was still considered too early to judge.

In terms of the main COVID-19 findings of, and emerging recommendations from, the APRA pivot, the top-level findings from the third synthesis of the multi-phase assessment study which is due to be published shortly include:

- There are differential impacts from COVID-19; it is not a 'food production crisis' (yet) but more an 'income-nutrition-livelihood crisis'.
- Some households are coping and finding ways to adapt – showing an emergence of a 'COVID economy' – but this may be short term. How long can they continue to 'hang in'?
- COVID-19 is one of many stressors reported – households are affected by multiple short and long-term shocks and stresses (climate, locusts, conflict, etc.), and these are often intersecting.
- Government responses are mixed – early lockdowns were seen as positive action initially, but there were concerns about maintaining controls for political gain; resistance was observed over time; later relaxing of measures was welcomed.
- While the negative impacts are largely the result of government measures (rather than actual morbidity and mortality from COVID-19), there has been little support from governments (or others) to help tackle the challenges restrictions caused – there was a clear need for additional humanitarian/

emergency assistance and social protection to prevent people 'dropping out' of productive agriculture and falling into destitution.

Some emerging recommendations include:

- To mitigate COVID-19's impacts on livelihoods and food systems, countries must meet the food, nutrition and income security needs of their vulnerable rural and urban populations, keep agricultural markets open and trade flowing, and support smallholder farmers and small and medium-sized enterprises to continue to operate.
- Adaptive social protection measures can build the resilience of both rural and urban households to the impacts of large natural and human-driven shocks, such as pandemics, but structural inequalities must be addressed to ensure these reach the poorest and most vulnerable populations
- Particular attention must be paid to women and young people, who are more likely to work in the informal sector, have lower incomes and often play a central role in household reproduction and the care economy.
- COVID-19 provides an opportunity to rethink policies for ensuring food and nutrition security and economic recovery that are aligned with the commitment of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to 'leave no one behind'.

Overall, the high quality and quite timely (especially early-on) APRA publications and blogs on the impact of COVID-19 and accompanying restrictions on rural areas provided additional evidence for decision-makers and academics. APRA evidence seems to have reinforced and extended other research which has found that in some ways the 'cure' (i.e. policy response to impose strict lock-down measures in the early stages) was worse than the disease and that a more measured, lighter-touch approach, combined with social protection measures, was or could be more effective.

Lesson 4 – A research programme like the COVID-19 pivot seems likely to make a contribution to knowledge and policy alongside many other sources of evidence. Timely communication of the evidence using multiple complementary channels like social media, blogs, newspaper articles, seminars, on-line events, summarises, and more formal academic publications, all have a role and are likely to be mutually reinforcing. This needs adequate planning and resourcing.

6 UNINTENDED POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FROM APRA'S WORK ON COVID-19

The 'COVID pivot' in early 2020 was a remarkable effort by an already fully-stretched team facing additional, and at that stage, largely unknown, challenges due to the pandemic. Indeed, the fieldwork work started (at risk to IDS) before official approval was given by FCDO because of the urgency and commitment to collect important evidence. The opportunity to use existing APRA farmer contacts and trained researchers was realised. The COVID-19 pivot produced some important evidence in early outputs, highlighting potential risks in terms of welfare, gender and the rural economy from lockdowns and other restrictions. This provided an important early additional narrative in some countries, and reinforced by well-written blogs. The later publications covering the three data collection rounds alongside the qualitative information will provide an important data source for future study and analysis. To achieve this to a large extent within the existing budget and timescale seems to represent extraordinary value for money.

On top of this in 2020, the whole APRA programme was asked to make budget cuts for the final 18 months of the programme. Alongside the COVID-19 pivot, this represented a 22 per cent budget cut to the planned and contracted agricultural commercialisation work of APRA. Despite this, APRA has still delivered its target outputs, but there have been stresses and challenges. In many cases APRA staff have contributed more than could normally be expected. Some additional data collection, and particularly qualitative work, including reporting back and verification with communities had to be curtailed. Some of the opportunities to work across Work Streams and across disciplines, like the integration of the country COVID-19 data collection and the value chain studies, could not be fully achieved. There may be opportunities for further analysis of existing data and for further collection.

There are a few within APRA who question whether the COVID-19 pivot was a wise move in relation to possible compromises to the overall outcomes of APRA. It does seem that the additional COVID-19 outputs have been significant alongside the original inclusive commercialisation evidence outputs. However, it does

need to be recognised that there are consequences from continually expecting to get more from the same budget. At some stage human capacity is used up. Economising on some of the qualitative work does run the risk of interpretation being less grounded in the lived experience of the women and youth, the target groups the research is supposed to ensure are included.

Lesson 5 – It can be possible to deliver more for the same budget within a programme like APRA, particularly during an international crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic when motivation to contribute more to vital evidence is high. Synergy and goodwill can be exploited to deliver more. However, there are limits: human capacity can become exhausted, and quality may become compromised. This is an issue that needs careful consideration by both funder and contractor.

Lesson 6 – The COVID-19 multi-phase assessment data is a rich source of data for future analysis, including possible extension of the panel for future data rounds by APRA researchers and others. Future access to raw data and issues of confidentiality need to be considered.

ANNEX 1 – THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS: AN E-DIALOGUE OVERVIEW (APRA BLOG)

Posted on February 15, 2022 by FAC ICE team



COVID-19 and its effects on local food systems and rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa

9 February, 2022
13.00-15.00 GMT



As COVID-19 took hold in March 2020, the primary focus was on ensuring that people stayed healthy and safe from infection. However, it soon became clear that the pandemic would have much further reaching effects than just the disease itself – and nowhere was this more evident than in sub-Saharan Africa.

Restrictions enforced to help curb the pandemic created additional challenges for a region already facing myriad trials, from climate change and malnutrition to political unrest and inflation. Many parts of society were negatively affected, none more so than the agricultural sector. Thus, on 9 February 2022, researchers of the Agricultural Policy Research in Africa (APRA) programme, together with expert commentators, came together for a two-hour e-Dialogue to discuss, more specifically, the effects of COVID-related interventions on rural livelihoods and local food systems in the region and what can be done to support their recovery.

Despite the fact that households in Africa demonstrated impressive resilience and managed to defy the United Nations World Food Programme's prediction that the number of those experiencing hunger would double, families did not go unscathed – and “an intersecting

crisis between food and livelihood has been noted,” highlighted Amrita Saha, APRA researcher and Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies. The lockdown restrictions, which varied in severity between countries, posed one of the biggest challenges. Movement restrictions halted in-country and cross-border trading, causing huge financial losses. Unable to match their usual trading levels, households saw decreases in income and, in turn, experienced higher food insecurity and lower living standards. These movement limitations also had consequences for those (such as farmers) working elsewhere in the production process: for example, with significant labour shortages and breaks in supply chains further contributing to reduced food supplies and incomes. Thus, the APRA findings suggest that the shock of COVID-19 has resulted not so much in a “food production crisis” as an “income-nutrition-livelihood crisis” for many communities.

Worsening inequalities

The lack of State aid and humanitarian relief created issues in many countries. Social support payments for individuals in sub-Saharan countries typically totalled less than US\$5 per person, and a lack of communication

and accessibility saw large numbers unable to obtain even this small amount. There were also discrepancies between support measures provided to urban and rural communities, with the latter being more frequently overlooked. In these instances, households relied on aid from local religious organisations and traditional leaders rather than the state or other outside agencies. But, according to John Thompson, CEO of APRA and Senior Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, this was “very piecemeal”. While there was evidence of the emergence of a “COVID economy” in some places, where people were able to adapt the restrictions by shortening supply chains, producing and selling masks and soaps, and so on, this was also patchy.

In addition to new challenges, the pandemic served to exacerbate and highlight existing concerns – a key one being that of gender imbalance and bias. “Women have borne the brunt of COVID-19 related impacts,” stated Akosua Darkwah, associate professor of sociology at the University of Ghana. For instance, women in the agricultural sector “struggled to access resources previously – and COVID-19 only exacerbated this issue,” shared Aida Isinika, Professor at Sokoine University of Agriculture and Country Lead for APRA Tanzania. Government measures and policies created to assist families during the pandemic also rarely took women into account, said Sandra Gagnon, Programme Officer at Canada’s International Development Research Centre. “Policies aimed at formal businesses excluded low-income women engaged in production and informal trading,” she added. Furthermore, with schools closed and children at home, women were tasked with childcare and home-schooling responsibilities – leaving them with notably less time and energy to dedicate to their own work and pursuits, either on- or off-farm.

Planning for a stronger future

A number of recommendations were made with regards to what households, communities and governments can do to be more resilient to future shocks, such as the pandemic. Digital innovation was a key suggestion, as this “will create opportunities for extension, remote education and trade,” suggested Matsautso Chimombo, Lecturer in Rural Sociology at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources and APRA Malawi researcher. Greater access to the web will allow for online trading when it is not possible to do so in-person and, in some instances, this is already occurring: Darkwah revealed that traders in Ghana began engaging in deals virtually following the introduction of movement restrictions. Providing better internet and telecommunications access would also serve to enhance the flow of information to all actors

across food chains, which is critical so that “individuals can make more informed decisions,” said Isinika. Governments also need to ensure their policies and support measures are more inclusive, encompassing both genders, all age groups – youths were particularly affected by the pandemic – and communities. “While it was positive to see that social protection was ramped up,” noted Steve Wiggins, Senior Agricultural Economist at the Overseas Development Institute and APRA researcher, he saw no reason why they could also not have increased even further. While richer countries in the North didn’t hesitate to run-up large budget deficits during the pandemic, most African countries were constrained in their spending as a percentage of GDP. However, it seems that some lessons have been learned by those in power and positive changes are occurring as a result – with ministers in Malawi dedicating more funding to hospitals and medical supplies, for instance.

Maximising resilience

Finally, it’s important for people to recognise the value of community. While “community support efforts rose to new levels,” explained Adebayo Aromolaran, Professor at Adekunle Ajasin University and APRA Nigeria researcher, households should better utilise farmer organisations – as these provide an invaluable source of assistance across a number of areas, including loans of otherwise costly agricultural equipment. Ultimately, the agricultural sector needs to be viewed more broadly and larger emphasis put on more than just a few primary areas – such as imports and exports, economic growth, and environmental impact. Only then can resilience be maximised and guarantees put in place to ensure that no-one is left behind in the face of evermore frequent shocks and stresses.

ANNEX 2 – MEDIA COVERAGE FROM APRA COVID-19 E-DIALOGUE

9 February 2022

Farmers Review Africa

The effects of COVID-19 on local food systems and rural livelihoods

<https://farmersreviewafrica.com/the-effects-of-covid-19-on-local-food-systems-and-rural-livelihoods/>

Kenya Broadcasting Corporation

Effects of COVID-19 on local food systems and rural livelihoods

<https://www.kbc.co.ke/effects-covid-19-food-systems-rural-livelihoods/>

Financial Day

The Effects Of COVID-19 On Local Food Systems And Rural Livelihoods

<https://financialday.co.ke/2022/effects-covid-19-local-food-systems-rural-livelihoods/>

AgriFocus Africa

The Effects Of COVID-19 On Local Food Systems And Rural Livelihoods

<https://agrifocusafrica.com/2022/02/21/the-effects-of-covid-19-on-local-food-systems-and-rural-livelihoods/>

East Africa Business Times

Recommendations in tackling the effects of Covid-19 on rural livelihoods

<https://www.eabusinesstimes.com/recommendations-in-tackling-the-effects-of-covid-19-on-rural-livelihoods/>

Smart Farmer Africa

How COVID-19 interventions affected food systems

<https://smartfarmerkenya.com/lasting-effects-of-covid-19-on-food-security/>

East Africa Agribusiness Magazine

The effects of COVID-19 on local food systems and rural livelihoods

<https://ea-agribusiness.com/the-effects-of-covid-19-on-local-food-systems-and-rural-livelihoods>

HortiNews

Webinar spotlights effects of COVID-19 on rural livelihoods and food systems

<https://www.hortinews.co.ke/webinar-spotlights-effects-of-covid-19-on-rural-livelihoods-and-food-systems/>

Africa Business Communities

How COVID-19 shaped local food systems and rural livelihoods <https://africabusinesscommunities.com/agribusiness/news/how-covid-19-shaped-local-food-systems-and-rural-livelihoods/>

Startup Weekly

Experts weigh in on Covid's impact on local food systems

<https://www.startup-weekly.com/Experts-weigh-in-on-Covids-impact-on-local-food-systems/>

Farmers Trend

The effects of COVID-19 on local food systems and rural livelihoods

<https://farmerstrend.co.ke/trending/the-effects-of-covid-19-on-local-food-systems-and-rural-livelihoods/>

Zawya

Effects of Covid-19 on local food systems and rural livelihoods in Africa

https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/economy/story/Effects_of_Covid19_on_local_food_systems_and_rural_livelihoods_in_Africa-SNG_290876512/

Bizna

The Effects of Covid-19 on local food systems and rural livelihoods in Africa

<https://biznakenya.com/local-food-systems/>

BizCommunity

Effects of Covid-19 on local food systems and rural livelihoods

<https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/358/225284.html>

Farming Portal South Africa

The effects of COVID-19 on local food systems and rural livelihoods

<https://farmingportal.co.za/index.php/all-agri-news/press-release/7541-the-effects-of-covid-19-on-local-food-systems-and-rural-livelihoods>

ANNEX 3 – PRESS CUTTING FROM THE TANZANIA PERSPECTIVE 2/06/2021



Rice value chain indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted rice value in Tanzania. Photo: APRA's courtesy.

How COVID-19 affects Tanzanian rice processors

By Correspondent

Literature indicate that rice processing has been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic since its appearance in the country in mid-March, 2020.

According to latest research findings that focused on rice processors, farmers, input suppliers and service providers in Morogoro and Mbeya, Agricultural Policy Research in Africa (APRA)'s Researchers, Professor Ntengua Mdoe, Prof. Gilead Mlay and Dr. Gideon Boniface, stated that the interviewed processors reported that they operate below the capacity of their processing facilities owing to the decline in domestic and export trade of milled rice.

Professor Ntengua Mdoe, Prof. Gilead Mlay and Dr. Gideon, who are also Lecturers at Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), however, detailed that processing facilities owned by exporters of rice to Malawi, DRC Congo and Zambia have been the most affected following closure of borders and restriction of vehicle movement across their borders.

Evidence from actors in the rice value chain indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted rice value in Tanzania, affecting all actors in the value chain to a variable degree.

Overall, small-scale operators such as traders and farmers were more affected than large-scale operators. Export traders were more

particularly exporters of rice to Malawi, DRC Congo and Zambia.

Small-scale traders were more affected than medium and large-scale traders. In fact, some of the small-scale traders were compelled to step out of the rice trading business.

Likewise, small-scale farmers, small-scale input suppliers and services were more affected than their medium-scale and large-scale counterparts.

Telephone interviews with some farmers in Morogoro and Mbeya regions showed that the effect of COVID-19 varies across rice growing areas different rainy seasons.

Measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic were instituted in March 2020, after positive cases were reported in

They were implemented when rice in many growing areas was at an advanced growing stage that required limited external inputs (except locally sourced labour) for weeding, bird scaring, harvesting, threshing and sorting.

In areas where rice required external inputs farmers were apparently affected in two ways: Rising input prices due to limited availability because some rural input dealers were hesitant to travel to urban areas to purchase inputs because of fear of the pandemic;

Farm-gate prices declined in response to a lower retail rice price in urban areas and limited number of rice buyers travelling from urban to rural areas. On average farmers in Morogoro reported that farm-gate price declined from TZS

COVID-19 to TZS 1,100 (\$0.47) per kg after COVID-19 while farmers in Mbeya reported a decline from TZS 1,250 (\$0.54) before to TZS 800 (\$0.34) after.

This has depressed farmers' income from rice by almost 27 percent and 36 percent in Morogoro and Mbeya respectively.

We interviewed suppliers of seeds, fertilisers and pesticides in major rice producing regions of Morogoro and Mbeya.

Despite the variation across these regions, most of them indicated that the COVID-19 crisis has had little impact on their business because the pandemic was announced in mid-March 2020 when most of them had already planted rice and the rice was already at growing stage that required limited inputs.

However, they were skeptical about serious negative impacts if the pandemic persisted to October-December 2020 because some rice inputs such as fertiliser and herbicides, are imported.

This will affect rice productivity in the next farming season and, consequently, low rice output and income from rice production which will undermine food and nutrition security.

On effect on service providers, they interviewed providers of financial services to traders and processors of rice in the Morogoro region.

All interviewees indicated negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on borrowing and repayment of loans in terms of decline in the number of businesses borrowing and repaying loans.

However, microfinance institutions with limited operating capital were the most affected.

All in all, evidence from actors in the rice value chain indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted rice value in Tanzania, affecting all actors in the value chain to a

Source: © The Tanzania Perspective, reproduced with permission

ANNEX 4 – SUMMARY COVID-19 FIELD RESEARCH FINDINGS PER COUNTRY

Country	New knowledge	Use of knowledge	Outcomes possibly influenced
Ethiopia	Though agricultural activities were not affected by the measures taken to prevent and control COVID-19, it has affected availability of inputs, limited ability to sell agricultural produce, and increased food prices.	<p>The evidence was communicated at all APRA Ethiopia events:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sequence of meetings as member of the advisory team for the <i>Ethiopia's National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP) Ethiopian Fiscal Years 2013–2022 (General Calendar 2021–2030)</i> 2. APRA Ethiopia's national dissemination workshop held on 29 November 2021. 3. The Eighth General Meeting of CARD (GM8) held virtually on 6 and 7 October 2021. 4. A virtual event – Nourishing East Africa in a post-COVID 19 world: pathways and challenges in building sustainable value chains for the Africa rice sector – held virtually on 29 July 2021. 	Not yet.
Tanzania	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. COVID-19 had disrupted rice trade and caused job losses along the value chain. 2. COVID-19 lowered farmers purchasing power and eventually limited their ability in accessing the necessary inputs and services needed for production. 3. COVID-19 imposed food insecurity threats following decline in peoples purchasing power. 	<p>These finding were shared with the media during a media workshop.</p> <p>One newspaper (<i>The Citizen/Mwananchi</i>) picked it and publish a news article.</p>	Not yet.

Malawi	<p>1. A slowdown in agri-markets, due to COVID-19-induced border closures and transport costs increases, threatened household food security due to overselling of produce from food crops.</p> <p>2. COVID-19 led to households having excess family labour, resulting in low demand for hired labour; a situation which negatively affected the livelihoods of those that survive by hiring out their labour.</p> <p>3. Existence of strong and pervasive misconceptions about COVID-19 among rural populations.</p>	<p>The government's National Planning Commission developed a post COVID-19 economic recovery plan in which APRA Malawi's Round 1 and Round 2 reports were cited as reference material.</p> <p>Evidence of misconceptions has been used by the government and non-governmental organisation (NGO) actors in designing social behaviour change communication aimed at dispelling the misconceptions.</p>	<p>The Round 1 and Round 2 of APRA Malawi's COVID-19 study reports were cited in Malawi's post COVID-19 economic recovery plan.</p> <p>APRA Malawi findings on misconceptions and myths about COVID-19 made it as a front-page news main headline in two leading daily newspapers in Malawi. The journalist of the story shared the findings with key government and civil society organisation leaders in health, including the Minister of National Unity and Civic Education who proposed to lead the country in designing and intensifying civic education on COVID-19; and indeed COVID-19 education was intensified.</p>
Country	New knowledge	Use of knowledge	Outcomes possibly influenced
Ghana	<p>1. The effect of the COVID-19 crisis on food systems and rural livelihoods in Ghana has been generally disruptive, exacerbating existing livelihood vulnerabilities.</p> <p>2. The shock of COVID-19 has resulted in an income-nutrition-livelihood crisis rather than a food production crisis in the study communities.</p> <p>3. Households demonstrated resilience in the face of the COVID-19 crisis as reflected in trade diversion, from cross border trade to national markets, diversification into a range of off-farm livelihood activities and shifting towards more local production and shorter value chains.</p> <p>4. The COVID-19 pandemic sparked food price hikes which resulted in high cost of living, threatening household food security.</p>	<p>These findings were shared widely with actors in Ghana's agricultural policy formulation and implementation space through APRA Ghana dissemination events, online publications, and social media engagements via Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.</p> <p>Evidence presented at APRA dissemination workshops was widely circulated by national online media platforms including <i>Ghanaweb</i>, <i>Ghana News Agency</i>, <i>Graphic online</i>, and <i>the Business & Financial Times</i>. The APRA Ghana team continues to receive positive feedback on their findings posted on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.</p>	<p>Though not directly cited in recent policy documents, findings from the study appear to be shaping the government's response to livelihood challenges imposed by the pandemic (i.e., recent government policies such as the YouStart initiative under the GhanaCARES programme which aims to create 1 million jobs with GH¢1 billion seed capital). The government also proposed a reduction in electricity tariffs to cushion households and partly reduce the cost of production for small-scale businesses.</p>

Nigeria	<p>1. COVID-19 induced restrictions on the movement of people disrupted the flow of annual migrant labour from the middle belt to other parts of Nigeria, thereby contributing to a decline in land area cultivated to crops by households.</p> <p>2. COVID-19 lockdowns disrupted non-farm business activities, resulting in loss of work days or outright lay-off of many non-farm business employees.</p> <p>3. COVID-19-related restrictions in movement of goods, both domestically and across national borders, disrupted food and agro-input supply chains, and resulted in sustained upward pressure on food and agro-input prices.</p> <p>4. Households experienced a substantial decline in the frequency, quantity and quality of food consumed during COVID-19 compared with pre-COVID19 period.</p>	<p>The links to all of the COVID-19 publications were circulated among stakeholders in the APRA network in Nigeria. This included top government officials at all levels, private sector actors, NGOs, farmer association leaders, rural community leaders, academics etc.</p>	<p>Farmers associations in south-western Nigeria have now started a farm mechanisation purchase and rental programme to reduce the effect of future shocks on hired labour supply.</p> <p>The federal government of Nigeria established a <i>Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan</i> which is a micro, small and medium-scale survival fund scheme meant to cushion the effect of COVID-19 on businesses. The fund has so far disbursed over ₦57 billion (or US\$123 million) to small businesses.</p> <p>The federal government has recently suspended a planned increase in fuel pump prices.</p> <p>The Central Bank of Nigeria set up a private sector relief fund which has now amassed over ₦25 billion to address issues relating to COVID-19 mitigation and recovery efforts. Fund will used to provide medical equipment and materials; and render urgently needed palliatives to the poor and vulnerable segments of society.</p>
Country	New knowledge	Use of knowledge	Outcomes possibly influenced
Zimbabwe	<p>COVID-19 impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption to labour supply. • Rising cost inputs. • Disruption to marketing – especially farmer access to tobacco auctions. • Rising cost food. • Loss of employment income. • Food insecurity. 	<p>Policy implications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more investment in data, evidence and analytics. • Need to focus on inclusiveness and stakeholder engagement. • Need technical innovation to transform food systems. • Need a broader food systems lens. <p>These issues have been highlighted from an early stage in the pandemic through well-read blogs. Diversion of tobacco through informal traders was taken up by the local media and the Tobacco Board.</p>	<p>Tobacco diversion has been taken up by the Tobacco Board and Ministry of Agriculture. It is unclear yet with what result.</p>

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