

Stories of Change

Building safer and more sustainable food systems in Peru

The Covid-19 pandemic has aggravated the food insecurity situation of people living in Latin American cities. In Peru, the most vulnerable are facing great difficulties in accessing food, while food market vendors are also struggling to keep their businesses afloat. Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) partner Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE) – a renowned Latin American development research centre based in the country – has been working with the authorities in Peru to support community-managed kitchens. These are led by women to provide affordable food to people in poor areas. The team has also been collaborating with the private sector and municipal authorities to improve the functioning of traditional food markets.



Community-managed kitchen in San Juan de Lurigancho, Lima.
Photo: GRADE

The challenge

Covid-19 has exacerbated food insecurity in Peru, which was a concern even before the pandemic. For poor urban households, food access is a twofold problem. On the one hand, most of these households lost their main source of income (mostly from the informal sector) during the long and strict lockdowns, leading to many of them having to cut down on food consumption. GRADE estimated a 30 per cent decrease in food expenditure for poorer households in Lima. On the other hand, one of the principal sources for fresh and low-cost food products for this population are traditional food markets. Most of these are located in the periphery of cities and have an informal governance structure. Many struggled to conform with the new sanitary measures introduced during the pandemic, became hubs of Covid-19 infection, and closed or scaled down their activity.

The research

As part of the **'Building back better: Using a disruptive crisis to achieve sustainable and gender inclusive improvements in food security, labour markets and social protection'** project, GRADE has been researching what cost-effective policy options – and unforeseen opportunities – exist for Peru and other Latin-American countries. In terms of food security in Lima, the team has been researching the difficulties that the most vulnerable urban households have been facing to access food (fresh products in particular) during the pandemic. Based on research studies and initial pilots, the team has been working with national and local actors to design evidence-based interventions that can help these households improve their food security, and local food vendors economically recover from the crisis – while ensuring that the spread of Covid-19 is minimised in these markets.

“This research has significantly contributed to our understanding of how community-managed kitchens operate, how they are organised, and the interdependence among them and other similar initiatives. It has generated evidence for further and more accurate policy design.”

Silvana Vargas, former Minister of MIDIS (2020–21)

The impact

When Covid-19 hit, women in poor areas of Lima worked together to get food for their neighbourhoods. These community-managed kitchens (*ollas comunes*), which have frequently appeared in times of crises in Peru, have been playing a very important role in providing affordable and subsidised food in poor urban neighbourhoods during the pandemic. Initially, these organisations didn't get any help from the government as they were not formally recognised and the law didn't allow transferring resources to them.

Faced with this situation, locating and collecting information about these community-managed kitchens in an attempt to better understand their needs, identify ways to improve their functioning, and make them visible to the authorities, became a key focus for the project. GRADE's team started working closely with The Metropolitan Municipality of Lima on a new programme – Manos a la Olla – to support the community-managed kitchens with a training programme on nutrition, management, and health practices skills. This initiative is now being implemented at the district level. Based on this experience, they started working with the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion on a new national strategy – Hambre Cero – whereby they are helping other local governments to identify, assess and prioritise districts with higher demand for food through community kitchens in vulnerable areas – in close collaboration with local grass roots organisations.

In parallel to these efforts, the research team has been developing tools to enable local food markets to reduce the risk they pose for spreading the disease, while improving healthy food systems and supporting market vendors not only during this crisis, but from now into the future. Findings revealed that people were reticent to enter the markets and buy food with cash when the markets re-opened. This was seen as an opportunity to partner with the Peruvian Bank Association and local governments to promote and evaluate the use of digital money in food markets – a phenomenon that was already taking place in cities, especially in well-to-do neighbourhoods. Currently more than 200 food markets in various cities of Peru are using this system, with an initial adoption rate close to 30 per cent and growing. Building on this, an online platform was conceived and co-designed with vendors to promote e-commerce in traditional food markets to help reduce crowding in markets. It is currently being piloted in two markets in Lima.

GRADE's collaboration with different municipal governments, local traders, and communities, facilitated communication among them to provide practical and evidence-based solutions to food security problems. As a result of this support, the national government now has a clear protocol to identify and help community-based initiatives to fight hunger. This is incredibly important as Peru faces the prospect of future economic and food crisis.

Further reading

Alcázar, L. and Fort, R. (2022) *Resiliencia en Tiempos de Pandemia: el Caso de las Ollas Comunes en Lima, Perú*, Avances de Investigación 41, Lima: GRADE (accessed 15 July 2022)

Keefer, P.; Espinoza, M.; Espinoza, Á. and Fort, R. (2019) *The Impact of Social Ties and Third-Party Enforcement on Collective Action and Growth: Micro Evidence from Peru*, Washington DC: Inter-American Development Bank, DOI: [10.18235/0002093](https://doi.org/10.18235/0002093) (accessed 1 June 2022)

Building back better: Using a disruptive crisis to achieve sustainable and gender inclusive improvements in food security, labour markets and social protection

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This project focuses on cost-effective policy options and unforeseen opportunities for Latin America and the Global South to reduce the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19, promote a more equitable recovery and lay the foundations for a new, more inclusive architecture of social protection.

About this report

This Stories of Change was written by Ricardo Fort, Group for the Analysis of Development and Karine Gatellier, CORE Knowledge Translation Team at the Institute of Development Studies.

It was produced as part of the Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Knowledge Translation Programme, which supports the translation of knowledge emerging from the CORE initiative. Supported by the International Development Research Centre, CORE brings together 21 projects to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery.

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