

# The socioeconomic impact of Covid-19 in low- and middle-income countries: A synthesis of learning from the Covid-19 Responses for Equity Programme

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# Contents

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<b>1. Overview</b>	3
1.1 Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE)	3
1.2 Purpose of this synthesis report	4
1.3 Structure of this report	4
1.4 Methodology	5
1.5 Limitations	5
<b>2. Summary of findings</b>	5
<b>3. Livelihoods and food</b>	5
3.1 Food systems and farming under increased pressure	5
3.2 Jobs lost and income insecurity	6
3.3 Migrant workers face greater restrictions	6
3.4 Informal economy workers hit hardest	7
3.5 Gender and the informal economy	8
3.6 Supporting women and girls engaged in informal work	9
<b>4. Social protection</b>	10
4.1 The case for prioritising social protection	10
<b>5. Macroeconomic policy</b>	10
5.1 Fiscal policies central to equitable pandemic response	10
5.2 Synergies between fiscal measures needed	11
5.3 Macroeconomic policy needs to focus on gender	12
<b>6. Governance</b>	13
6.1 Collaborative governance during a pandemic	13
6.2 Harness the citizen response	13
6.3 The dangers of a militarised response to pandemics	13
<b>7. Cross-cutting themes</b>	14
7.1 Inequality	14
7.2 Gender	14
7.3 Conflict-affected contexts	15
<b>8. Building back better – regional summaries</b>	16
8.1 South Asia	16
8.2 Sub-Saharan Africa	16
8.3 Latin America	16
8.4 Europe	17
8.5 Middle East and North Africa	17
<b>9. New ideas and approaches</b>	17
9.1 Harnessing technology	17
9.2 Legal reform	18
9.3 Research methodologies	18
9.4 Research engagement and impact	18
<b>References</b>	20

# 1. Overview

## 1.1 Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE)

Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) is a three-year rapid research initiative funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). It brings together 21 research projects across 42 countries to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery.

The below table lists all 21 CORE research projects. Click on the links below for more information about each project and a list of all research partners.

Project	Countries	Lead partner
<a href="#"><u>The Impact of COVID-19 on Inclusive Development and Democratic Governance: Rapid and Post-Pandemic Assessment in the Mekong Subregion</u></a>	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam	Cambodia Development Resource Institute
<a href="#"><u>Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises, Food Security, and Evolving Social Protection Mechanisms to Deal with COVID-19 in Pakistan</u></a>	Pakistan	Sustainable Development Policy Institute
<a href="#"><u>Colabora.Lat: Towards a New Model of Governance after Covid-19</u></a>	Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico	Asuntos del Sur Asociación Civil
<a href="#"><u>Simulations and Field Experiments of Policy Responses and Interventions to Promote Inclusive Adaptation to and Recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis</u></a>	Argentina, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Vietnam, Zimbabwe	Partnership for Economic Policy
<a href="#"><u>Providing Timely Evidence to Facilitate the Socio-Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic in Rwanda</u></a>	Rwanda	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR-Rwanda)
<a href="#"><u>Promoting Resilience in COVID-19 in MENA: Building Inclusive and Effective Social Protection and Safety Nets</u></a>	Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia	Arab Reform Initiative
<a href="#"><u>Mitigating Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19 and Promoting Post-Pandemic Resilience in Uganda</u></a>	Uganda	Economic Policy Research Centre
<a href="#"><u>Informal Workers and COVID-19: Evidence-Based Responses to the Crisis at the Base of the Economic Pyramid</u></a>	Ghana, India, Mexico, Peru, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing Limited (WIEGO)
<a href="#"><u>Improving the Targeting of Public Policies for Decent Work in Francophone Africa in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic</u></a>	Benin, Cameroon, Morocco, Niger, Senegal	Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar
<a href="#"><u>Impacts of Public Policies Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Informal Sector, Young People, and Women: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal</u></a>	Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal	Centre ivoirien de recherches économiques et sociales (CIRES)
<a href="#"><u>Sowing Development: Small Scale Agriculture and Food Security Resilient to Covid-19</u></a>	Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico	RIMISP – Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural
<a href="#"><u>REBUILD: COVID-19 &amp; Women in the Informal Economy in Kenya, Uganda &amp; India</u></a>	India, Kenya, Uganda	International Center for Research on Women

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<a href="#"><u>COVID-19 and the Youth Question in Africa: Impact, Response and Protection Measures in the IGAD Region (COYOQA)</u></a>	Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda	Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa
<a href="#"><u>Building back better: Using a disruptive crisis to achieve sustainable and gender inclusive improvements in food security, labor markets and social protection</u></a>	Ecuador, Peru	Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE)
<a href="#"><u>Bridging Communities in Cox’s Bazar: Mitigating Risks and Promoting Gender, Governance, and Localization of Humanitarian Responses in the COVID-19 Era</u></a>	Bangladesh	The BRAC University
<a href="#"><u>Addressing COVID-19-Related Vulnerabilities for Migrant Returnees in Central America’s Northern Triangle</u></a>	El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras	Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales
<a href="#"><u>A New Digital Deal for an Inclusive Post-COVID-19 Social Compact: Developing Digital Strategies for Social and Economic Reconstruction</u></a>	Colombia, India, Nigeria, Peru, South Africa, Sri Lanka	Research ICT Africa
<a href="#"><u>Shaping the Macro-Economy in Response to COVID-19: A Responsible Economic Stimulus, a Stable Financial Sector, and a Revival in Exports</u></a>	Bangladesh, Kenya, Peru, Sri Lanka, Tanzania	Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
<a href="#"><u>COVID-19 Macroeconomic Policy Response in Africa</u></a>	Benin, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda	South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)
<a href="#"><u>The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Livelihoods in Africa</u></a>	Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, Zambia	African Economic Research Consortium (AERC)
<a href="#"><u>Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on African Economies, Social Cohesion, and Governance: Evidence from Benin, Burkina Faso and South Africa</u></a>	Benin, Burkina Faso, South Africa	African School of Economics

## 1.2 Purpose of this synthesis report

This report provides a snapshot of the research undertaken and published by members of the IDRC-supported CORE programme. It sets out the main themes addressed by the research in relation to Covid-19 impacts on industries, sectors and socioeconomic groups in locations across Africa, Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America. This includes both descriptions of how the pandemic has affected the lives of people from marginalised and excluded communities, and the efficacy of policy responses to the pandemic. Much of the learning arising from this ongoing research has implications for the pandemic response in different contexts, for building resilience against future shocks, and for the challenges of undertaking applied research during a global health emergency.

Given the diverse spread of the 21 projects rapidly mobilised by the IDRC across 42 countries during the early stages of the pandemic, this summary of findings is, by its very nature, far more focused on some areas and geographies than others; it in no way claims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the socioeconomic impact of Covid-19. Nonetheless, it does provide some important learning for researchers, policy actors and practitioners seeking to build back better in the wake of an unprecedented global health emergency.

## 1.3 Structure of this report

The pandemic has had intersectional impacts across all aspects of people’s lives, including their livelihoods and food security, social protection, fiscal policies, governance and public health. Therefore, the sections or themes set out here inevitably overlap and there may be some repetition. Nonetheless, we have tried to provide an overview of the learning from the research projects against some key categories of Covid-19 socioeconomic impacts. Cross-cutting themes that did not easily fit into any one section are addressed separately. All the research cited here is fully referenced and we have provided links to related open access outputs so that the reader can explore further the areas that are of most interest to them.

## 1.4 Methodology

This review initially started with 245 outputs submitted by CORE projects, [167 of which are catalogued in the CORE collection on the open access repository OpenDocs](#). Documents selected for content analysis were text-based research outputs, including policy briefs, research reports, fact sheets, working papers, evidence reviews, journal articles and learning guides. Blogs, media articles and multimedia were beyond the scope of this review. Some documents were left out because they did not include clear findings or were largely focused on methods rather than implications for non-academic audiences.

Based on these criteria, 93 outputs were analysed. We extracted key findings and messages from each to identify themes and groupings. Further themes and synthesis emerged during the writing-up phase. Most of the 21 CORE projects were still ongoing at the time of writing, and this review only includes a picture thus far from a programme due to end in mid-2023.

## 1.5 Limitations

This reports provides a rapid review of outputs; it is not a systematic review. The choice of themes, synthesis of research and analysis has not been validated by the relevant CORE research teams. This is a snapshot taken part way through a programme and is only intended to provide a summary of some of the more prominent themes and findings emerging from a rich and diverse portfolio of ongoing research.

# 2. Summary of findings

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Covid-19 has hit marginalised people the hardest, and important themes have emerged from CORE research across regions and sectors that have profound implications for pandemic preparedness and response in low- and middle-income country (LMIC) settings. The pandemic has had intersectional impacts on people's lives across the dimensions of livelihoods and food security, social protection, fiscal policy, gender, governance and public health. It has also dramatically exposed weaknesses and inequities in social protection systems, food production and distribution, job security, tax and poverty alleviation.

Many CORE research projects have produced solutions that directly address the social injustices that remain largely untouched by the biomedical response to the pandemic. These include: support for piloting community managed kitchens in Peru to address acute food shortages; promoting relief measures for migrant workers in India; promoting universal basic income in the Middle East; and recommending direct cash transfers and food support in East Africa.

These solutions are grounded in the lived experiences of the hardest-to-reach communities and in sophisticated modelling and macroeconomic analysis. CORE researchers have identified some of the population groups that are most vulnerable to shocks. Rural women-led households, informal workers and migrants have suffered some of the worst social and economic impacts of the pandemic due to deep-rooted inequalities. As a body of research, CORE provides powerful evidence for investment in inclusive social protection systems, synergising fiscal policies to protect the most vulnerable against environmental and economic shocks, and making macroeconomic policy gender-focused.

# 3. Livelihoods and food

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Covid-19 is having a major impact on households' production and access to quality, nutritious food. This is due to losses of income combined with increasing food prices, and restrictions on the movement of people, inputs and products. CORE research is highlighting the predicament of those working in the informal sector, particularly women, including migrant workers, waste-pickers, sex workers and street vendors. Recommendations for addressing the impacts of Covid-19 on marginalised groups include food system reforms and adaptive social protection measures that target women and young people in the informal sectors. This evidence is pertinent to longer-term recovery and to building resilience to future shocks.

## 3.1 Food systems and farming under increased pressure

Studies on livelihoods and food systems find that primary risks are at the household level (Thompson *et al.* 2021). Production has been affected as well as access to quality food as incomes have reduced and food prices have risen. Women-led households and rural areas are experiencing the worst levels of food insecurity. Women are more likely to work in the informal economy, have lower income, and bear the extra burden of domestic work.

Salik (2021) produced a needs assessment for the agricultural sector in Pakistan, which showed that rural areas were worst affected during the pandemic. Smallholder farmers were particularly affected by reduced incomes and livelihood assets, and increasing indebtedness. Traders and exporters were negatively affected as informal farm labour was not available and transport was restricted, and the costs of seeds, fertiliser and other farm inputs also increased. The study finds that the most vulnerable part of the food chain affected by restrictions on movement during the pandemic was the lack of storage for commodities, particularly perishable goods. The study's recommendations include designing and promoting post-harvest value addition, and improving cold storage facilities and logistics to reduce losses. Private sector investments and innovations could be used to support this development. Farm labour registration would help to get support to workers during shocks such as Covid-19.

Research by the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP) reveals the extent of reductions in income caused by the pandemic, affecting more than 70 per cent of households in some areas. Miguel Albacete, Project Coordinator, explained how this could undermine work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets: 'The results of our study in Latin America suggest that the war against hunger and malnutrition enshrined in SDG 2 is at stake in the face of the pandemic's impact on food security' (Thompson *et al.* 2021).

In Peru, the most vulnerable groups are struggling to access food, while food market vendors are also struggling to keep their businesses afloat. The Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE) has been working with the authorities to support community-managed kitchens, led by women, to provide affordable food to people living in poor areas of the capital, Lima. The team has also been collaborating with the private sector and municipal authorities to improve the functioning of traditional food systems (Alcázar and Fort 2022).

## 3.2 Jobs lost and income insecurity

The voices of citizens in Gampaha, Sri Lanka, were recorded by several participants on smartphones, producing eDiaries. Interviews were conducted via voice call to capture the views of those who did not have a smartphone (Samaratunga, Hurulle and Galpaya 2021). Respondents reported impacts of Covid-19 on household income and difficulties accessing services.

Salik's (2021) study in Pakistan indicated that Covid-19 led to the loss of remittances from informal labourers who previously worked elsewhere in the country generating off-farm income.

In Jordan, early impact reporting finds that 40 per cent of survey respondents reported that a family member lost their job between mid-March and mid-May 2020 (Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies 2020). Some had partly lost their job, while 23 per cent of respondents were unaffected. Just over a third of respondents (36 per cent) working in the private sector reported that their job had completely stopped, compared to 57 per cent of self-employed workers. Men's jobs or male-owned businesses were most affected by the lockdown (*ibid.*).

## 3.3 Migrant workers face greater restrictions

Across a number of the countries studied, migrant informal workers faced more restrictions during and after lockdown than local informal workers (Ismail and Valdivia 2021). They also experienced greater restrictions in accessing relief measures, which compounded their difficulties in lack of family networks to help them cope. As a major livelihoods strategy, measures to support this group are crucial. Greater understanding of the needs of this group will help to design appropriate support. Being registered outside of their city is a particular problem for this group.

In India, safe shelter for migrant workers was limited during the pandemic and its associated restrictions (Pillai *et al.* 2022c). The government provided trains to help migrants exit the city, and an estimated 60 million migrants moved from Delhi back to their home state, leaving a shortage of labour. Researchers from the Quantum Hub and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) analysed the government's policy response to urban migrants' rental housing needs – Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs)<sup>1</sup> and Shelter Homes. Their recommendations for improving the scheme include: consulting with informal workers to set an affordable rent limit; developing standard operating procedures for successful ARHCs; and using data on informal workers to ensure adequate housing capacity. The ARHC framework needs to directly address the needs of migrants, and include provision for single women, disabled people and widowed women. States are also recommended to set up migrant hostels and night shelters for migrant workers to provide temporary as well as longer-term shelter.

<sup>1</sup> Utilising existing government-funded vacant houses or constructing on vacant land (<http://arhc.mohua.gov.in/>)

### 3.4 Informal economy workers hit hardest

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) led a study in 12 cities assessing the impact of Covid-19 on informal workers (Chen *et al.* 2021). Research took place in: Accra, Ghana; Ahmedabad, India; Bangkok, Thailand; Dakar, Senegal; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Delhi, India; Durban, South Africa; Lima, Peru; Mexico City, Mexico; Pleven, Bulgaria; New York City, USA; and Tiruppur, India. The research assessed the impact of the pandemic at two points: peak lockdowns (April 2020) and easing of lockdowns (June/July 2020). A second round of research assessed continuing impacts versus signs of recovery in the first half of 2021. Informal sectors studied include home-based workers, street vendors, waste pickers and domestic workers.

The extent of impacts varied according to occupations and cities (WIEGO 2021a). The different intensity of restrictive measures affected the intensity of negative impacts on informal workers. Changes in demand, supply, prices, wages or piece rates and other factors impacted specific groups of informal workers differently (Chen *et al.* 2021). For example, live-in domestic workers fared better than live-out domestic workers, and street vendors who sold food did better than those who sold non-food items.

Some informal workers were providing essential services and were exposed to physical and mental health risks, with very little protection (Braham and Ogando 2021). Membership-based organisations of informal workers have been vital in providing support where government support was lacking. Braham and Ogando suggest that 'the onset of the pandemic necessitated an increased awareness of occupational health and safety among informal workers, which may have long-term benefits' (*ibid.*: 1).

Vaccination coverage among informal workers across the cities studied was low, even where workers were obliged by employers and local authorities to get vaccinated (Braham 2021). Barriers to accessing vaccinations include inequities in distribution, and the informal nature of the labour that workers perform. Grass-roots advocacy for vaccinations has had some success.

In Accra, Ghana, street vendors, market traders, waste-pickers and *kayayei* (a female porter) were interviewed (WIEGO 2022a). Those surveyed were members of the Informal Hawkers and Vendors Association of Ghana (IHVAG), the Greater Accra Markets Association (GAMA), the Kpone Landfill Waste Pickers Association and the Kayayei Youth Association. The first round of research found that workers had largely returned to work but that earnings had not yet recovered. The study also found an increase in household stress levels and a lack of government relief.

#### Situation reports from India, Thailand, Tanzania and South Africa

Situation reports from the first round of WIEGO research are available for: Ahmedabad, India (WIEGO and Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) 2020); Bangkok, Thailand (WIEGO 2021b); Tiruppur, India (WIEGO 2021c); Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (WIEGO 2021d); Durban, South Africa (WIEGO 2021e); and Pleven, Bulgaria (WIEGO and UNITY 2021).

Key findings include the following:

- Informal workers in Accra, Ghana, are getting no relief from the government (WIEGO 2022a). Household food insecurity is rising and assets have been severely eroded.
- In Ahmedabad, India, 80 per cent of workers had returned to work by August 2021 but were working considerably fewer days than before Covid-19 (WIEGO and SEWA 2022). Earnings were around 77 per cent of pre-Covid earnings. Since August 2020, 85 per cent of informal workers had to resort to negative coping strategies.
- In Bangkok, Thailand, all informal workers apart from domestic workers were earning less than 40 per cent of their pre-pandemic earnings as at mid-2021 (WIEGO 2022b). Respondents reported that the health and economic crisis had put severe strain on their mental health.
- In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, almost half of survey respondents in mid-2021 reported hunger among adults in their household (WIEGO and the Conservation, Hotel, Domestic and Allied Workers Union (CHODAWU) 2022). Around a third of those who had children reported that their children experienced hunger. More than a quarter of respondents reported increased psychological stress compared to pre-Covid-19.

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- In Delhi, India, surveys in mid-2021 show there has been no recovery for informal workers and the situation is worsening (WIEGO 2022c). The negative effects of the pandemic are disproportionately borne by women. Nearly half of all respondents reported hunger in their household. Government relief has been insufficient.
- In Durban, South Africa, slightly more workers reported being unable to work in July/August 2021 than in mid-2020 (WIEGO and Asiye eTafuleni 2022). Nearly all workers were on a lower income than before the pandemic. Food insecurity is still at a higher level than before the pandemic but slightly reduced compared to mid-2020. More workers were accessing social protection support in 2021 than in 2020.
- In Pleven, Bulgaria, most workers had returned to work by mid-2021 and were working similar hours as they did before the pandemic (WIEGO and the Trade Union of Self-Employed and Informal Workers (UNITY) 2021). Home-based workers were earning a little over 50 per cent of what they were earning pre-Covid-19. Sixty per cent reported being vaccinated. Of those that were not vaccinated, 51 per cent reported concerns over side effects, and 50 per cent said they needed more information.
- In Tiruppur, India, 16 per cent of informal workers in the knitwear industry were working in mid-2021. This was an increase compared to April 2020 (12 per cent) but a decrease compared to June 2020 (25 per cent). Work insecurity was reported to be due to government and factory restrictions, market and supply chain dynamics, and lack of public transport. Since mid-2020, 75 per cent of informal workers surveyed had received some cash relief from the government, and 88 per cent had received some food aid.

### 3.5 Gender and the informal economy

The ICRW undertook a three-country research study on how the pandemic and policy responses have interacted with pre-existing gender dynamics (ICRW 2020). The research explored outcomes around livelihoods, gender-based violence (GBV) and violation of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for women who work in the informal economy in Kenya, Uganda and India. Other key areas of vulnerability include access to utilities, disproportionate burden of care work on women, and the mental and psychological impacts of Covid-19 (Banerjee *et al.* 2022).

The studies found that 88 per cent of women used up all of their savings to cover their living expenses, 91 per cent lacked access to non-Covid-19 health care, and 88.7 per cent lacked information (ICRW n.d.).

Kenya's informal workers did not benefit from the government's social protection measures or the economic stimulus (Afifu *et al.* 2021a). As Afifu and colleagues state, 'Covid-19 containment measures also increased women's and girls' exposure to GBV at home and within the marketplace' (*ibid.*: 3). The study found that it was difficult for women to report GBV and to access sexual and reproductive health services due to movement restrictions and the stigma surrounding coronavirus.

Another study finds that informal workers are central to post-pandemic recovery in Kenya and should be a focus for recovery policy efforts (Ajema *et al.* 2021) and that leaders of women workers' associations should be involved in policy mechanisms for economic recovery. Policy could include fiscal measures to cushion informal workers and industries, economic Smart Stimulus packages to include women in the informal sector, fund digital innovation, and extend low-cost responsive credit finance.

A policy analysis of informal women workers in Uganda reports that 75 per cent of micro and small businesses laid off employees during the pandemic (Afifu *et al.* 2021b). In Uganda, 87 per cent of informal workers are women (Wandera *et al.* 2021). The government's economic stimulus was more beneficial to formal sector workers, and excluded women in the informal sector. Informal workers had difficulty accessing credit, financing and tax relief (Afifu *et al.* 2021b). Recommended policy interventions include developing a gender-inclusive regulatory framework to support informal sector women workers to create secure livelihoods and generate employment opportunities. Social protection policy needs to be reviewed and strengthened (Wandera *et al.* 2021). Workplace investments in childcare are also needed.

Research from the ICRW reports on the gendered impact of pandemic-related lockdowns on urban informal workers in the Delhi National Capital Region of India (Pillai *et al.* 2022a). The study also assessed the effectiveness of the various state and non-state responses for relief and recovery, measured in terms of effectiveness, unintended effects, equitable access, cost, feasibility (institutional capacity), and presence of informal/ alternative mechanisms.



During lockdowns, women were restricted in accessing services to support victims of violence (Pillai *et al.* 2022e). Researchers expressed difficulty in making inferences based on the data available. Recommendations include the creation of 'facilities to record data anonymously about women's experiences in reporting violence to improve services and mechanisms for redressal' (Pillai *et al.* 2022e: 10).

In Latin America, gender gaps were exacerbated by the pandemic as most women work in the informal sector, with no access to social protection (Gender in Latin America Working Group 2022).

## Sex workers – stigma and criminalisation

Sex workers in India were labelled virus 'super-spreaders' and experienced high levels of food insecurity during lockdowns (Nanda *et al.* 2022). Sex workers, who already had limited access to health care, encountered even more problems during this time. Brothel-based workers were confined to their rooms in poor conditions. Studies identified mental health problems among this group. Work moved to phone-based apps, and many did not have the digital literacy to manage this. Stigma and criminalisation meant that sex workers were excluded from government support. They were marginalised and excluded from information and facilities. Civil society groups helped to provide food, masks and sanitiser to sex workers. To aid future disaster preparedness for sex workers, they should be able to access digital literacy programmes and be recognised as citizens. Trained workers are needed to provide mental health support for sex workers and transgender people struggling in isolation.

## Sanitation workers – vulnerability to Covid-19

Sanitation workers in India were particularly vulnerable during the pandemic. As a group, they have traditionally been marginalised due to caste-based discrimination, which has limited their access to resources (Nanda *et al.* 2022). The pandemic highlighted the precarious nature of sanitation workers' lives. Lack of protective equipment and sanitiser is thought to have contributed to many deaths among these workers. Stigma and isolation have also affected their mental health. As one study reports, 'A major shift in policy perspective is needed to ensure dignity of labor, opportunities for breaking the intergenerational cycle of engaging in sanitation and scavenging work and access to skills and resources for development to catch up on lost time' (Nanda *et al.* 2022: 28).

## 3.6 Supporting women and girls engaged in informal work

Recommendations for future research in this area include looking at the coping mechanisms used by women workers during crisis situations, the impact of the pandemic on women's agency and decision-making, and digital illiteracy (Banerjee *et al.* 2022).

A paradigm shift is required to support women informal workers, alongside expansion of childcare infrastructure (Ogando, Rogan and Moussié 2021b). Public care services need to incorporate informal workers' needs, demands and work conditions.

An evidence review published by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation makes a number of recommendations for supporting women's informal employment (Lakshmi Ratan *et al.* 2021). Measures that combine social protection and labour protection policies need to account for the importance of female informal workers to the economy and prioritise reaching them with government schemes. This group would benefit from short-term cash grants and food relief during a crisis, and need better access to health insurance, pensions, and care in old age. Trade unions and cooperatives representing women informal workers must be recognised and supported in times of crisis. Again, there is a need to invest in childcare infrastructure.

Informal women wage workers need labour market policies that address wages, employer-worker relations, insurance, and workers' ability to negotiate (Lakshmi Ratan *et al.* 2021). This would include a minimum wage rate for hourly, daily, monthly and piece-rate work. Relations between employers and workers should be institutionalised for transparent decisions around hiring and dismissal. Accident and liability insurance should be mandated. Public works programmes should aim to create stability for these workers. The study again recommends skills training in the use of technology in the fields or sectors that women work in. Global brands should be held accountable for conditions in their supply chain.

Informal women-run enterprises need to be recognised and incorporated into government programmes (Lakshmi Ratan *et al.* 2021). There is a need for new methods of evaluating businesses that take into account informal characteristics so that affordable financing support can be provided. Governments should increase procurement from women-led enterprises. Psychology-based skill-building programmes have shown success in supporting entrepreneurship among women to help them set up and run informal enterprises. Skills training for technology is needed for women workers to remain competitive in their field or sector.

## 4. Social protection

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Across much of the research published so far from CORE, there are observations around the impact of Covid-19 on groups who are excluded from social protection schemes. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing weaknesses in social protection systems in all regions. Many studies include recommendations for a more inclusive and adaptive approach to social protection, and there is already a strong focus on this as central to preparing for future health and economic emergencies.

### 4.1 The case for prioritising social protection

Studies in the CORE programme across continents found that social protection needs to be prioritised when responding to infectious disease outbreaks (Thompson *et al.* 2021).

Less than half of the workers surveyed in the WIEGO informal economy study received cash or food in cities where relief measures were announced (Alfers, Ismail and Valdivia 2020). Food relief in the initial months of the crisis was limited, uneven and insufficient (Roever and Rogan 2020). Workers resorted to coping strategies that eroded existing assets. Grass-roots organisations were found to play an important part in informal workers' access to relief (Alfers *et al.* 2020).

In the informal sector, government relief efforts (where available) were important; however, their reach was uneven and limited (WIEGO 2021a). In terms of economic wellbeing, many informal sector workers in India had not received benefits from cash transfer schemes (Pillai *et al.* 2022b). One issue identified by research was that the government was leaving employers with responsibility for ensuring the economic wellbeing of workers where they themselves had limited resources. Cash transfer amounts were insufficient.

A report from the Arab Reform Initiative outlines the concept of a universal basic income (UBI) and explores experiences across the world (Visozo 2020). The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been absent from UBI discussions. Formal employment and wage labour, which provide the foundation for social insurance models, are lacking in the region. The informal sector is large, the taxation system weak, and formal welfare is underdeveloped. Options for UBI would likely involve reallocating or cutting public expenditures. A second source of potential funding is sovereign wealth funds. Outside of Gulf Cooperation Council countries, existing government debt would need to be reduced or cancelled. Foreign aid should consider focusing funds on UBI.

## 5. Macroeconomic policy

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The Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions have had profound socioeconomic impacts worldwide. Governments have had to respond urgently to mitigate these impacts, especially for the most vulnerable groups in society. CORE research is producing a rich set of findings around these impacts. Close collaboration with governments responding to the crisis have produced a range of monetary and fiscal policy recommendations for longer-term recovery and future resilience. From interest rate policies and quantitative easing, to progressive taxation and trade policy, the research is actively informing the macroeconomic response in multiple countries.

### 5.1 Fiscal policies central to equitable pandemic response

The pandemic has highlighted structural deficits in African economies. Shipalana, O'Riordan and Prinsloo (2020) propose a number of recommendations for post-Covid recovery. These include: suspending credit rating assessments from agencies until a return to pre-Covid levels of global production; governments, central banks and regulators coordinating policy at a continental level; central banks considering monetised, deficit-financed interventions; and developing countries with a large informal sector leveraging digital technologies to provide basic financial services.

Analysis of macroeconomic policy in Nigeria identified a number of lessons (Ekeruche and Adeniran 2021). The Central Bank's support to the private sector risks exposure to default and debt monetisation. Commercial banks are finding it difficult to meet credit demands due to 'the credit worthiness of borrowers, weak monetary policy transmission and a high cash reserve ratio' (*ibid.*: 19). A narrow range of interventions is thought to constrict businesses with outstanding financial commitments. A key recommendation is to ensure the independence of the Central Bank in the face of crisis. Long-term approaches are important, including 'strengthening social protection and public health systems, formalising the labour market and creating fiscal buffers' (*ibid.*: 20).

In Uganda, policy led to a reduction in the market interest rate to boost private sector investment and household consumption (Okumu, Kavuma and Bogere 2021a). The government also moderated the financial market against liquidity risk, capital adequacy risk and credit risk, which supported stability. Financial soundness indicators remained above regulatory requirements. Fiscal policy was also deemed successful as it provided a temporary liquidity shield through tax relief for formal businesses, but at a cost of increased public debt. The protected livelihoods and jobs should support repayment of this. Recommendations for Uganda include: boosting aggregate demand with expansionary policies; continuing to ease liquidity constraints for small businesses; and economic stimuli for the worst affected sectors (education, accommodation and entertainment) (Okumu, Kavuma and Bogere 2021b).

Research on Bangladesh recommends: taking a countercyclical fiscal policy stance in the face of deceleration in aggregate demand; directing fiscal resources towards those who have a high propensity to consume and invest; and providing direct cash transfers, food support, and enhanced public expenditure on health and education (Bhattacharya, Khan and Rabbi 2021). Modelling suggests that increased government transfers to low-income households reap greater benefits for real consumption in poor households. And an increase in spending on health and education will have a positive impact on real gross domestic production and exports. It is suggested that it is limited government capacity rather than lack of resources that is most challenging for expansionary fiscal policy.

Early comparison of economic stimulus packages between G20 and sub-Saharan African countries found large differences – 27 per cent and 3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) respectively (Raga and Houseini 2020). Stimulus packages in sub-Saharan Africa were mostly supporting immediate short-term response. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are providing funding for the economic policy response in that region, but it is insufficient to meet shortfalls. With constrained fiscal space and uncertainty of monetary policy outcomes, it is necessary to investigate policy steps looking at how different policy scenarios could play out, trade-offs between long- and short-term policy outcomes, long-term impacts of pandemic disruptions, and opportunities for green and gender-balanced stimulus packages.

## 5.2 Synergies between fiscal measures needed

An Overseas Development Institute (ODI) synthesis paper explores policy responses and options for rebuilding in Bangladesh, Kenya, Peru, Sri Lanka and Tanzania (Raga and te Velde 2022). Monetary responses were found to be fast and substantial, but fiscal responses were constrained. Countries with high public debt relied on monetary policy (in the case of Sri Lanka) or tax relief (in the case of Kenya). It recommends that 'Risks from accelerating inflation, debt pressures and financial stability need monitoring' (*ibid.*: 1). Synergies among policy instruments should be maximised – for example, targeting measures with high multiplier effects.

Another ODI paper outlines a methodology and detailed steps for analysing macroeconomic policy options (Keane *et al.* 2021). Impact pathway case studies are from Bangladesh, Kenya, Peru, Sri Lanka and Tanzania. The steps should describe the Covid-19 impact baseline, develop policy options, then use 'appropriate methods such as causal chain analysis and modelling to analyse the impact of policy measures on economic, social/gender and environmental variables' (*ibid.*: iii). Key considerations on fiscal policy include focus of spending, multiplier and indirect effects, and debt sustainability. Considerations for financial policy include interest rate sensitivity, reach of targeted finance, and financial stability. Trade policy and production such as tariff and non-tariff barriers, free trade agreements, and investment support need to consider impacts on trade volumes and prices, consumer prices, productivity, and sectoral value added. All macroeconomic policies need to consider social, gender and climate issues.

Government interventions such as fiscal policy need to be balanced across small, medium and large exporters, with special provisions for new exporters (Thompson *et al.* 2021).

## 5.3 Macroeconomic policy needs to focus on gender

Using Bangladesh, Kenya, Peru, Sri Lanka and Tanzania as case studies, Papadavid and Pettinotti (2021) explore gender equality implications of different monetary policies, including interest rate policies, quantitative easing, restricting or earmarking specific constraints or provisions, and balance of payments policies. Identifying positive and negative effects on gender was found to be complicated, as women are such a heterogeneous group. Different characteristics determine the response to new economic incentives, from earning levels, migration status, marital status and age to level of education and training, sexual orientation, and motherhood. Lack of data is also an issue.

The manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh mainly employs women, who were very affected by shutdowns (*ibid.*). Low interest rates for investment in these areas should support female employment, dependent on increased demand for garments. Changes in borrowing requirements and repayment terms were put in place but none targeted women-owned businesses. Targeting is difficult due to the nature of the work (informal sector) and the lack of data. Data and tools also need to be developed to be able to earmark specific provisions.

It is recommended to develop data and tools for identifying sectors with the best potential for improving equality (Papadavid and Pettinotti, 2021). For example, lower interest rates for the agricultural sector would spur more investment on farms requiring more hired labour, which is often female.

In terms of monetary policy, Papadavid and Pettinotti (2021) recommend incorporating women's employment objectives into the Taylor rule,<sup>2</sup> which is used by central banks to control inflation. In addition to monetary policy, fiscal policies to help relieve women of their responsibilities caring for children and elderly family members would promote women's employment.

### Country Profile – Uganda

A comparison of the 2020 and 2021 lockdown impacts on Ugandan businesses finds a greater reduction in business activity and demand for products in the second lockdown, by around 70 per cent (Sunday *et al.* 2021). The second lockdown slowed or halted recovery from the first lockdown. Greater access to inputs and credit was made available in the second lockdown. Schools had to sell off assets and stop paying teacher salaries, and few teachers received government support. The study recommends identifying and targeting those in need of government support.

Small and medium-sized enterprises experienced more than 60 per cent reduction in sales and profitability (Mwesigye *et al.* 2021a). Business costs increased by more than 40 per cent, with women-owned businesses worse affected than those owned by men. The study identified 'a need to support businesses through loan restructuring, affordable and patient financial support, and tax incentives' (*ibid.*: 1).

Small and medium-sized agro-processing firms had decreased access to imported inputs (Lakuma *et al.* 2021). The productivity and quality of the products was affected. Use of digital payments was low due to security concerns, which need to be addressed. Very few firms accessed government stimulus packages; lack of awareness of available support and bureaucratic blockages need to be tackled.

Contracted activity in the transport sector in the greater Kampala metropolitan area had an adverse effect on tax revenue for the government, particularly fuel tax (Mwesigye *et al.* 2021b). Research found that it would be useful for fuel stations to conduct business for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) digitally but not for flammable and dangerous energy such as petrol and diesel. Again, there are issues around cyber insecurity. Recommendations based on this rapid assessment of the industry include: the need to build a database for taxi and boda boda drivers so that they can be reached when in need of assistance; reducing tax on fuel; and categorising fuel and gas station workers as essential workers.

Household enterprises reduced by around 7 per cent, with 200,000 households stopping their business (Sswenyana 2021). Western Uganda registered the most significant decrease. The availability of start-up capital was constrained, and there were difficulties in finding clients and accessing raw materials. Women-owned businesses dominate this sector, so policies that support its growth and development will support women.

<sup>2</sup> **Taylor's rule** is a formula to provide recommendations for setting short-term interest rates to achieve economic stability in the short-term and manageable inflation in the long-term.

## 6. Governance

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The pandemic has both mobilised citizens to support others in need, and generated a violent backlash against marginalised groups. CORE research finds examples of effective collaboration between civil society groups and different levels of government to support a more effective response to the pandemic. However, some studies have also highlighted securitised and militarised state responses, underpinned by panic and long-standing political disputes.

### 6.1 Collaborative governance during a pandemic

Empirical research in Latin America looked at the relationship between collaborative governance and Covid-19-related mortality (Cyr *et al.* 2021). Greater collaboration across levels of government and with social organisations was found to be more effective in containing mortality rates early on in the pandemic. 'The collaboration helped to foster cooperation over resources; buy time to prepare for a potential case surge; and produce a unified message regarding what citizens should do to prevent viral spread' (*ibid.*: 290).

In Tunisia, recommendations from one study note that recovery must be carried out at the general local planning level, with more specific planning by each municipality for its territory (Marrakchi 2020), as the municipal level is best suited to take into account local needs and nuances. The Local Government Act encourages allocation of funding to support people with special needs, people without family support, and women who have experienced violence. Priorities must be reformulated to manage limited budgets, and there is a need for legislation to detail shared competencies between municipal and central government.

### 6.2 Harness the citizen response

Concerned citizens and health experts in Lebanon formed the Independent Lebanese Committee for the Elimination of COVID-19 (Abi-Rached *et al.* 2020). They found government failure in terms of long-term prevention measures, lack of updated comprehensive national strategy, and a lack of data transparency. There were also unknowns in the process of contact tracing, and they questioned the validity of testing. Their report calls for a stronger public communication strategy, better coordination and collaboration with local authorities, a comprehensive strategy for education and awareness, reinforced border control and a wider social safety net.

### 6.3 The dangers of a militarised response to pandemics

Protests in South Africa during lockdown restrictions were met with excessive police violence. Rebello *et al.* (2021) suggest that this is most likely due to state securitisation and militarisation. The use of violence was legitimised by the collective sense of panic. The response to the pandemic was also top-down and paternalistic, which undermined the tradition of social cohesion. Lack of clear legislation and guidance on policing or the enforcement of restrictions was also a likely factor in the excessive violence. There are also unresolved legacies of police abuse, and a trust deficit between the South African Police Service and many communities that dates back to the apartheid era. Violent policing of black men in particular was driven by racial stereotypes (Langa and Leopeng 2020). The police service needs to professionalise and demilitarise.

Police violence and an overly militarised response were also noted in Kenya, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Iran and Hungary (Rebello *et al.* 2021). Policies and guidelines for enforcement in times of crisis need to recognise the challenges people face during a disaster, and foster social cohesion and cooperation.

## Country Profile – Ethiopia

The Ethiopian country profile (OSSREA n.d.c.) describes relevant policies and guidelines on a range of issues: international travel; closure of gathering places; avoiding overcrowding (social distancing); proper use of protection materials; scaling up of testing; spread of World Health Organization (WHO) recommended practices; increasing capacity of quarantine; encouraging voluntary work; and reaching rural areas. It describes community engagement – including youth engagement; a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) challenge for Ethiopian young people to come up with innovative solutions; youth volunteers against Covid- 19; empirical research recording knowledge, perceptions and preventive practices towards Covid-19; feedback methods; vulnerable groups, including low-income families, street children, health-care workers and people living in rural areas; training given for essential service providers; and general information on health facilities, transportation and public services.

The report highlights a lack of information on training given to essential service staff on risk communication, specific community engagement and actions in different parts of the country; and how evidence-based learning is being conducted by various actors.

A literature review outlines budgets released to the government by different agencies: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Union (EU), World Bank Group, the United Kingdom (UK), Ethio Telecom, and United Arab Emirates (UAE). The review documents civic engagement of young people, health-care workers and students who volunteered to help share information (OSSREA n.d.d.).

## 7. Cross-cutting themes

### 7.1 Inequality

The Mediterranean region has experienced large increases in multidimensional inequalities between countries during the Covid-19 pandemic (Al Shami 2021). These include income inequality, education inequality (due to lack of telecommunications infrastructure), health care, and gender inequality.

Older informal workers had a slower return to pre-Covid earnings than their younger counterparts (Alfers *et al.* 2021). There is also a theme of exclusion in terms of digital progress across sectors. A low proportion of people aged 60 and above have a pension in low-income countries, and men are more likely to have a pension than women. People living in countries with a social pension system in place were able to receive timely income support.

### 7.2 Gender

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the health, livelihoods and wellbeing of people, households and communities worldwide. As the pandemic progressed, the side effects of recovery efforts and containment measures have deepened existing gender inequalities and jeopardised the health and wellbeing of women and gender minorities. These inequalities have been particularly pronounced in LMICs.

In India, there was insufficient family planning during the crisis, and research looked at four policy announcements and schemes addressing health insecurity (Pillai *et al.* 2022d). Areas that had implemented the national public health scheme<sup>3</sup> had better family planning indicators but lower results on other care institutions compared to areas that did not implement the scheme. In June 2020, the scheme was extended to include migrant workers. Women accounted for around 45 per cent of the total authorised hospital admissions under the scheme. A number of civil society organisations helped provide sexual and reproductive health services.

There are concerns that increased use of technology will further exclude women – for example, digital finance (Ahmed and Chinembiri 2021), partly because women tend to have lower digital literacy than men (*ibid.*). Across the informal economy, women’s livelihoods were found to be more adversely affected by the pandemic than men (WIEGO 2021a).

<sup>3</sup> Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).

Among women in the informal economy, one study showed that those who reported increased care responsibilities were working fewer days and earning less than women whose care responsibilities were unchanged (Ogando *et al.* 2021a). Similarly, men with increased care responsibilities were working less but had not seen significantly lower earnings than men without increased care responsibilities. Access to childcare services is needed to support women in the informal economy.

A review on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and unpaid care work on informal workers' livelihoods states that: 'It is estimated that by 2030, the pandemic's effects on the resurgence of poverty will be felt hardest by women, particularly those in their prime reproductive and productive years and those from sub-Saharan Africa and South-Asia' (Ogando *et al.* 2021b: 28).

Studies with women working in agriculture in rural areas of Tunisia find that Covid-19 has exacerbated already existing vulnerabilities (Bajec 2020). Women were working in unsafe conditions with no protective equipment, and those who were unable to sell their products (due to the closure of food stalls) lost their income. The government response was insufficient, and there is a need for greater recognition of the specific needs of this group. Grass-roots organisations are supporting with technical training, empowerment and self-awareness, and provide information on how to set up business activities. Rural women's work should be regularised, and donors should mobilise resources to fund sustainable projects for rural women.

## 7.3 Conflict-affected contexts

### Libya

Early on in the Covid-19 crisis, research on the health and humanitarian situation in areas of Libya affected by conflict found a lack of coordination and ineffective measures to fight the spread of the virus, which worsened the situation for the people involved (Basha 2020). Truce agreements failed and there was a crisis in delivery of essential services. Military operations continued to increase.

### Rohingya

During the pandemic, among Rohingya people displaced from Myanmar and living in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, pregnant and lactating mothers were identified as the most vulnerable groups, alongside adolescent boys and girls, female-headed households, people with disabilities and the elderly (Hossain *et al.* 2021). The study found inadequate birthing facilities, large numbers of adolescents dropping out of school (75 per cent), particularly poor health among elderly people, feelings of inadequacy among people with disabilities, and extreme economic hardship among female-headed households (Centre of Excellence for Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights n.d.). Only 14 per cent of female-headed households received food or cash from government agencies (*ibid.*). Gendered social and cultural norms are deeply embedded in this community, and there are relatively limited economic opportunities (Hossain *et al.* 2021). Research finds that many Rohingya lacked accurate knowledge of Covid-19 transmission or prevention measures. There is an urgent need for clear, culturally appropriate messaging.

A situation report describes the impacts of a fire that broke out in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh during the pandemic (Ahmed *et al.* 2021). It affected 48,300 people in three camps, who lost their homes and belongings. Water and sanitation facilities were also destroyed or damaged, which has made the situation very challenging. Emergency food was distributed but some households did not receive any. Individuals were separated from their families, and a lack of privacy, safety and security for women, girls and adolescent boys has contributed significantly to high levels of vulnerability. There are concerns over trafficking of women and children. Health-care facilities were damaged, and those with burn injuries were not able to access immediate help. The report shares excerpts from interviews with those affected.

Building gender- and age-segregated shelter facilities for the many thousands of residents affected by the fire is a priority (Ahmed *et al.* 2021). Drinking water and solid waste management are also desperately needed. Psychosocial support is recommended for those who need help dealing with trauma. Streetlights are also needed to help keep girls safe at night.

## 8. Building back better – regional summaries

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The CORE research is providing learning around building back better. Many of the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable groups are found to be related to long-term underinvestment in social protection and health systems as well as labour market and economic policies that fail to promote inclusive growth and social justice.

Raga and te Velde (2022) suggest maximising efforts towards a rainbow economic recovery that is transformative, more inclusive, and works for the climate. Stimulus packages should be better targeted around health, education and social protection, promoting inclusive growth. Boosting regional trade and attracting foreign direct investment is recommended for Sri Lanka. More ambitious donor support is required in terms of green financing, debt restructuring, structural reforms and social safety nets.

### 8.1 South Asia

Policy for recovery in South Asia should prioritise addressing the health and socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic (Javed, Ahmed and Cheema 2021). Policies should focus on reducing poverty, restoring employment, creating new opportunities by providing universal health care, mainstreaming gender into social protection systems, and reducing the digital divide in education. The authors suggest that vaccination should be considered as an economic policy and should be distributed equitably. Progressive taxation – shifting the burden from poor people to rich people – should be achieved through simplifying and digitising the tax process, and investing in data collection and assessment capacities. Financial inclusion should also be a priority, through expanding access to financial services, improving digital financial literacy, and increasing women's inclusion in financial systems.

### 8.2 Sub-Saharan Africa

Mutumbala (2021) identifies a number of priorities for fair recovery in sub-Saharan Africa. Governments are recommended to prioritise 'building a strong and resilient healthcare system; helping SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises] to revive growth; diversifying economic activities in export-oriented sectors; promoting digitalisation in education, governance, and economic activities; and strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation' (*ibid.*: 1). Safeguarding for SMEs is needed, with capital recovery programmes that forge strong links with financial services, and the informal sector should be formalised. Diversifying export commodities for greater security should include consideration of alternative sectors such as agriculture, solid minerals, manufacturing, and services; and capacity should be developed appropriately.

Recommendations include creating a sustainable and resilient economy with green finance mechanisms (Shipalana 2020). These include investment in renewable energy, establishing environmental funds, green fiscal reform, and greening the financial sector. Green bonds are thought to be 'one of the most readily accessible and economical options to help raise large amounts of capital for infrastructure development to meet environmental targets in Africa' (*ibid.*: 2). Targeted public finance is needed to decrease investment risk, create a stimulus for green investments, and leverage private finance for green investments.

Efforts should be made to support young Africans in post-Covid-19 recovery plans by supporting job creation in sectors such as tourism, agribusiness, information and technology, and other services (OSSREA n.d.e.). Young entrepreneurs need access to start-up capital, and education and training should be an integral part of recovery. Companies can support with learnerships, and graduate and internship programmes.

### 8.3 Latin America

Latin America has been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, with large income losses, high recorded numbers of deaths, and increased inequalities (Padilla, Machorro and Pira 2021). Policies for long-term reform should include 'renewing fiscal policies, strengthening democratic processes and participation, ensuring transparency and accountability of public services, and effective regional cooperation' (*ibid.*: 1). Policy must encourage inclusive growth with labour formalisation, improved social protection systems, and improved health care. Vaccination must be made available to all. Better technological infrastructure is needed to support the creation of small enterprises. Community-based care services are also needed so that women can balance family and work responsibilities (Gender in Latin America Working Group 2022). Care work needs to be revalued as a part of this agenda.

A policy paper provides a financially sustainable five-year strategy for building back better in Peru (Jaramillo and Escobar 2021). It highlights the importance of public investment for addressing structural weaknesses. This should be accompanied by a focus on public expenditure to build a more universal social protection system.



The authors show that this could help to close the gender gap in the labour market. Key findings include the following: public investment supports economic growth but not structural weakness; public spending in health can help build a universal social protection system and address gender imbalances in the labour market; public discussion on social protection should help to include formal employment and productivity enhancing reforms; and the sector mix in public investment has an impact on employment results.

## 8.4 Europe

In the Mediterranean, Al Shami (2021) suggests a need to focus on building back to reduce inequalities in the region rather than the reactive response so far, which has been 'ad hoc and short-sighted' (*ibid.*: 130). More inclusive public policies are needed for the longer term, and civil society organisations should be more involved in public policymaking.

## 8.5 Middle East and North Africa

Early reports on Tunisia, Lebanon (2020) and Egypt (2020) note the opportunity and necessity to build back better in these countries. In Tunisia, one study recommends that business support should aim to end vulnerability and tackle corruption, empowering vulnerable workers and strengthening social protection (Houerbi 2020). In Lebanon, there is hope that the pandemic recovery presents an opportunity to address deep-rooted and underlying socioeconomic challenges that threaten the country's development and stability (Diwan and Abi-Rached 2020). Covid-19 has exposed fragility in Egypt, rooted in structural problems and social grievances (Diwan, Houry and Sayigh 2020). A shift is needed towards greater openness in politics and markets. The government needs to allow the private sector to play a greater role in the economy.

# 9. New ideas and approaches

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The 21 CORE projects have all, to some degree, been involved in innovations and the development of new ideas around technology, policy, research methods and knowledge translation. The pandemic has created a unique and challenging environment that has required adaptations to evidence-informed policy and practice, and the production and use of research.

## 9.1 Harnessing technology

One study explores the potential for improving social protection coverage in Africa through artificial intelligence (AI) during the pandemic and beyond (Kabinga, Razzano and Chinembiri 2021), concluding that 'Interventions need to be context-specific, data-driven, and economically and politically beneficial' (*ibid.*: 5). Mobile and banking platforms that can be used without smart devices are needed for scale-up to be successful. Further recommendations include: strategic public and state-owned enterprise investments in AI-related infrastructure; open data policies; an information regulator for the enforcement of the Protection of Private Information Act (POPIA) (South Africa); and building fungible long-term public goods.

With the increased digitalisation of education comes greater exclusion of those who do not have access to technology (Hurulle 2021). That author suggests that 'telecommunications regulators should lead efforts to identify bottlenecks to widespread coverage and high quality of service experience'. Telecommunications infrastructure such as telecom towers will support efforts towards increased coverage for digitalisation. In India, access was improved when the government loaned devices to students that were expected to be returned after they had completed their education. Further requirements for digitalisation of education include training of teachers to use digital tools to make lessons more impactful. Television (TV) and radio could also cover online content for those who lack access to a digital device.

The Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) describes a number of small-scale advances made by individuals. One young inventor designed a contactless electrical soap dispenser, a ventilator operated from a cell phone, and a device to remind people not to touch their faces (OSSREA n.d.d.). Other youth-led interventions across Africa include using social media apps to spread accurate information (OSSREA n.d.e.). In Ghana, a young engineer developed a solar-powered handwashing basin with sensors and an alarm to ensure that hands are washed for 20 seconds. Students in Senegal invented a 'doctor car', which operates in quarantine zones via mobile phone. It can monitor vital signs and deliver drugs, food and hand sanitiser to patients. And in Tunisia, teachers and students from the National Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology (INSAT) are developing the first openly available web-based platform that scans patients' lung X-rays for signs of Covid-19.

In Rwanda, the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (2021) outlines options for building on existing national government policy to expand e-commerce, and the use of online platforms to buy and sell products and services. These include: reviewing transaction fees and considering removing fees on small transactions; increasing access to and use of smartphones; improving the structure of the internet provider market to reduce internet costs and improve geographical coverage; expanding use of e-commerce platforms for connecting exporters to international markets; and targeting support for specific SMEs.

A needs assessment for Pakistan recommends 'developing a food security digital dashboard at district level for essential food commodities indicating the status of food production, consumption, stocks, and prices across Pakistan for effective and informed decision-making' (Salik 2021: 5). Improving internet connectivity for rural areas is also important to promote the digitalisation of food supply chains. Local capacities must be strengthened to ensure better risk assessments related to the pandemic and food needs.

To support the macroeconomy in Africa, countries with a large informal sector should leverage digital technologies to provide basic financial services (Shiplana *et al.* 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic represents an opportunity to develop new policies to ensure food security. The Sustainable Development Policy Institute's Centralised Data Visualisation Facility for Food Supply Chains 'analyses and monitors food supplies, demands, and price fluctuations to support policymakers in curbing food hoarding, removing bottlenecks in logistics, and controlling food prices through smooth supplies' (Thompson *et al.* 2021: 4). It provides the government with data on supply and demand fluctuations from the national level to the district level.

## 9.2 Legal reform

Research in Lebanon discusses how Covid-19 uncovered gaps in policies and law to protect physician safety (El Jamal *et al.* 2021). Since medicine is an independent practice, physicians are not governed by some labour laws. Issues were identified around compensation to the family in cases of disability or death of trainee physicians. The authors recommend that employer compensation for death be calculated based on the salary last earned by the trainee. Trainee physicians need to be paid more, and labour laws need to improve for better workplace safety.

## 9.3 Research methodologies

Challenges to research methods during the pandemic included technology and lockdown restrictions (Schmidt-Sane *et al.* 2021). Technology problems included internet connectivity, phone access, mobile data, and using unfamiliar digital tools. Lockdown and movement restrictions made it difficult to do follow-up, to generate rapport, or to hire and train new researchers. Researchers adapted in numerous ways, including snowball sampling via telephone, going through a gatekeeper, and switching to in-person sampling. New and old ways of working are being incorporated. Switching to Zoom meetings has enabled greater participation in locations where technology is available and functioning.

## 9.4 Research engagement and impact

Shared learning from the CORE programme identified a number of challenges around policy influencing during the pandemic (Meeker 2021). Reduced access to policymakers was an issue that required flexibility, adapting objectives to meet policymakers' needs, finding alternative platforms for engagement, and linking with existing advocacy channels rather than creating new ones. Other lessons include that stakeholder analysis should be expanded to help deal with government staff turnover. Mid-level staff and other actors should be engaged. Creating partnerships served to increase visibility. Using non-traditional communication methods allowed actors to engage with timely evidence in a rapidly changing situation. And to convey complexity and nuance to multiple stakeholders requires understanding the audience and tailoring messages to different audiences.

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) conducted a rapid review of approaches to engaging research with change processes during the pandemic. The review of more than 90 projects, enabled by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the Covid Circle and the UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR), included all 21 CORE projects. It was found that the CORE programme had the highest percentage of projects that were influencing changes in policy and practice (38 per cent). By far the most common forms of research engagement overall were focused on influencing thinking and awareness, and building networks and relationships to support the production and use of evidence. (Taylor *et al.* 2022)

## Story 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 business 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

Fort, R. and Gatellier, K. (2022) *Building Safer and More Sustainable Food Systems in Peru*, Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Stories of Change, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: [10.19088/CORE.2022.005](https://doi.org/10.19088/CORE.2022.005)

### 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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