

Policy Brief

The Role of Local Resources in Mitigating the Impact of Covid-19

Summary

Governments often found it challenging to mitigate the negative socioeconomic impacts of Covid-19 for households in and near poverty. Local efforts were critical to supplement government measures and implement government guidelines. In Ethiopia, these efforts mobilised a pre-existing, government-supported village network system. In Bangladesh, a network of formal and informal strategies played an important role in increasing assistance to people affected by the pandemic, including through industry-based corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. This policy brief outlines local responses to and lessons learnt from mitigating the negative socioeconomic impacts of Covid-19.

Key messages

- **Local resources and mobilisation played a significant role in mitigating the impact of the pandemic** – in Ethiopia, ad hoc committees collected crops from kebele (community) residents, which they redistributed to vulnerable local households that were not already covered by the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP).
- **A strong strategy needs to be developed to strengthen links between local government structures and local communities** – this could build on existing relationships; for example, during the pandemic, in collaboration with officials, companies in industrial areas of Bangladesh provided food and other assistance as part of their CSR initiatives.
- **The linkage between the government and local people should be interactive, relying on formal and informal relationships and communication** – given local people's in-depth knowledge of their contexts and needs, national governments should use and support grassroots participation to address crises.

Local resource mobilisation during the pandemic

Government support alone is often inadequate to respond to the needs of vulnerable groups. Governments often found it challenging to mitigate the negative socioeconomic impacts of Covid-19 on households in and near poverty. This was even the case where planned interventions existed. For example, in Ethiopia, there was little implementation of the fifth round of the

PSNP (PSNP5), with limited coverage, and limited amounts of grain and cash provided. In Bangladesh, many key informants similarly felt that government support was inadequate to respond to the needs of vulnerable groups. Partly as a result, in both countries, a raft of local resource mobilisation and support emerged to substitute or complement government efforts.

Case study: local responses in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, as the federal government became primarily engaged in the management of armed conflict at the same time as it was responding to Covid-19, local government officials adopted two approaches to managing the pandemic. Firstly, they tried to prevent the spread of Covid-19 through the lockdown guidelines the federal government provided. Secondly, they engaged in mobilising the local population to support the prevention and mitigation of

the impact of following those guidelines. This typically built on village network systems that were already in place and supported by the government, which were mobilised during the pandemic.

Examples of the type of support provided are illustrated in Figure 1. This support is also extended to sectoral development, especially around education as described in Box 1.

Figure 1: Local resource mobilisation in Ethiopia during the pandemic

Grain and cash support	Targeted support to vulnerable groups	Ad hoc local community support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local officials mobilised communities to collect grain and cash from better-off households to redistribute among poorer ones. 'The kebele [smallest administrative unit] organised support, and the community members voluntarily contributed food and money that served to help the needy households at woreda [district] level. Accordingly, our kebele had collected about 70 quintals of grain and 3,500 birr and gave it to the woreda' (health extension worker, Oromia Region, January 2021). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In some communities, support targeted those whose livelihoods were disrupted due to Covid-19. 'The kebele has facilitated the contribution of food and money from the community members that [was] pooled... the woreda redistributed the money and the food back to the most vulnerable groups of the community in each kebele. In our kebele, 150 daily labourers and 50 elders received maize and sorghum. The support was given three times' (kebele administrator, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region, January 2021). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During Covid-19, local communities often took on responsibility for supporting needy households that were not covered by PSNP. 'An ad hoc committee was formed to collect [several] kilograms of crops from the residents of the kebele, which were later distributed to the vulnerable. Otherwise, there is no specific policy or programme by an agency to make things better for the kebele people or the vulnerable' (development agent, Amhara Region, January 2021).

Source: Authors' own

Box 1: Local resource mobilisation to support education during the pandemic

To mitigate the spread of the pandemic, government guidelines advised schools in Ethiopia to teach in classrooms with a reasonably small number of students. However, with few classrooms and a high number of students per classroom in many schools, it was difficult to implement the directive. Local officials accordingly organised communities to support the prevention measures in schools, including by building more classrooms: *'The community built more than 16 classrooms in one school and [an]other 9 classrooms in the other school. They are both primary schools, teaching from grades 1 to 8. When the school was reopened, it offered lessons [for the] full day. One major change after Covid-19 is that it pushed for community mobilisation, building more classrooms, and changing to full-day schooling'* (KII, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region, 2022)

Schools also tried to ensure students used facemasks, but schools and families could not provide sufficient numbers. Moreover, schools tried to support poor students to continue their education during the pandemic. For example, in a school in Oromia, the local administration took the initiative to mobilise resources to support children from poor households so that they could attend school with their peers. In a school where there was no feeding programme, the school administration and teachers mobilised students' parents to contribute 1kg of food grain. The profit made from the sale of the grain and additional contributions from teachers were used to buy school uniforms and materials for students from poor households.

Case study: local responses in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, in addition to government relief efforts, many non-state actors at local level came forward to provide help for local populations affected by the pandemic. Their interventions focused on supporting the treatment of Covid19 and those economically affected by the pandemic.

In industrial areas of Bangladesh, where many of the largest companies reside, companies provided food and other assistance during the pandemic as part of their CSR initiatives. For example, the deputy commissioner (a district-level administrative officer) of Narayanganj district tried to mobilise other available resources when government efforts fell short. The deputy commissioner obtained gas cylinders from local businesses, asked for help from the president of the local recreation club, and asked big companies in the area to donate mattresses for intensive care unit beds as part of their CSR initiatives. District officials then distributed

these to people in and near poverty, based on who they considered eligible, which in some cases was demand driven. For example, a doctor interviewed at a government hospital could not get an approved supply of oxygen cylinders in time from the state administration, so he used contacts with private entities to mobilise delivery of 38 cylinders within several days.

Moreover, local resources helped mitigate the impact of the pandemic on laid-off workers and their families. The chair of a union parishad (the lowest tier of local government in Bangladesh) in Narayanganj confirmed:

In my area, the school teachers suffered a lot. Several private schools remained closed, and the schools' teachers did not receive any salary. As they were teachers and were concerned about their social status, they could not stand in line to receive support like the rest of the people. I reached out to the voluntary organisations working to support distressed people and asked them to help the teachers. These organisations responded, and we managed to provide food aid to them.

The deputy commissioner of Narayanganj similarly noted:

Government support was inadequate and we could not help all the poor industry workers. We had a meeting with the industry owners, described the situation to them,

and asked them to help the workers. Some industry owners helped the poor industry workers within the district through us; they provided food and cash support to us and we distributed that and in other cases, they themselves helped the industry workers.

Policy recommendations

The studies offered lessons to learn from to address similar crises in the future:

- **Governments should be ready to build on existing response programmes when crises emerge.** For example, the PSNP in Ethiopia could easily be expanded to communities that become insecure due to new crises.
- **Overall, a network of both formal and informal strategies played important roles in increasing the assistance provided to people affected by Covid-19** in their respective local areas. Indeed, as local resources and mobilisation played significant roles in mitigating the impact of the pandemic, a strong strategy needs to be developed to create links between local government structures and communities.
- **The linkage between the government and local people should, moreover, be interactive.** National governments should not only focus on the implementation of guidelines during the pandemic, but also make use of grassroots participation in helping address crises.

“A network of both formal and informal strategies played important roles in increasing the assistance provided to people affected by Covid-19.”

Further reading

BIGD & ARC (2021) [State of Governance in Bangladesh 2020–2021: Governing Covid19 in Bangladesh: Realities and Reflections to Build Forward Better](#), State of Governance Report Series, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) and Accountability Research Center (ARC)

Ministry of Education (2023) [Education Statistics Annual Abstract \(ESAA\) 2021–2022](#), Government of Ethiopia

Price, R. (2022) [Community-led Innovations and Actions in Response to the Covid19 Pandemic](#), Helpdesk Report, Covid Collective

World Bank (2021) [Ethiopia Economic Update: Ensuring Ethiopia's Full Recovery from Covid-19](#)

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