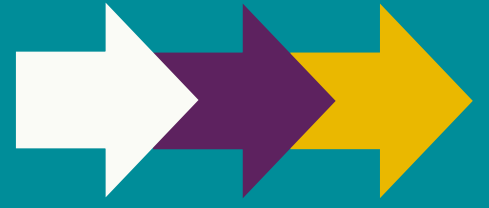


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Covid-19 Learning, Evidence
and Research Programme

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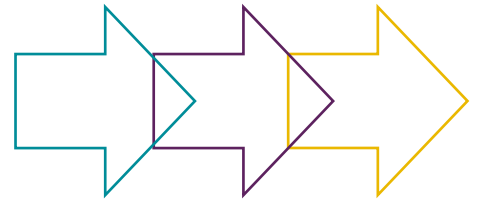
Synthesis Report 3

Multiple Crises, Coping Strategies, and their Longer-Term Impacts

Brigitte Rohwerder

May 2024






The Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh (CLEAR), coordinated by IDS, is building a consortium of research organisations in Bangladesh to generate policy-relevant research and evidence to support Covid-19 recovery and increase resilience to future shocks. CLEAR is funded by the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

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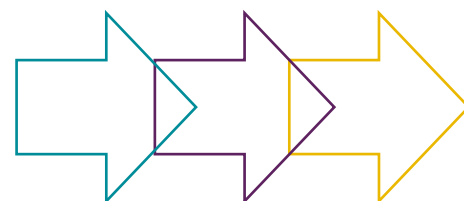
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Summary

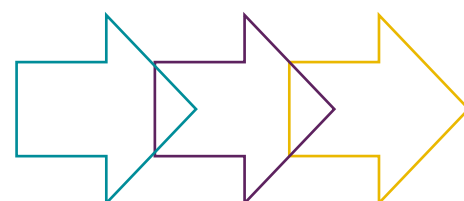
The multiple economic shocks during the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in an estimated 1.6 million people falling into poverty in Bangladesh, especially in urban low-income areas, those working in the informal sector, and women and marginalised groups. Four years later, recovery has been slow. This Synthesis Report gathers evidence from the Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh (CLEAR), looking at multiple crises, coping strategies, and their longer-term impacts. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods longitudinal research over the course of the pandemic and afterwards in Bangladesh illustrate the different strategies people used to try and cope with the multiple shocks they faced over time, and how depleting coping strategies affected their trajectories of poverty and recovery. Coping strategies included cost-cutting strategies such as reduced spending on food, health, and education. Financial strategies included depleting savings and depending on loans, leaving many stuck in debt traps. Livelihood strategies included finding alternative work (generally in less skilled or less secure, more precarious and vulnerable work compared with before the pandemic) and child labour. Access to social protection to cope with the crises they faced was patchy and inadequate, and hard to access for those who had not been poor before the pandemic. It was harder to escape the pandemic-induced poverty with depleted coping strategies, especially with multiple shocks, the lack of alternative livelihood opportunities, limited state support, and reduction of support networks among friends and family. The coping strategies had immediate and long-term negative implications for people's development and wellbeing, and challenge progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords

Poverty; Covid-19; crises; coping strategies; Bangladesh; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); human development.

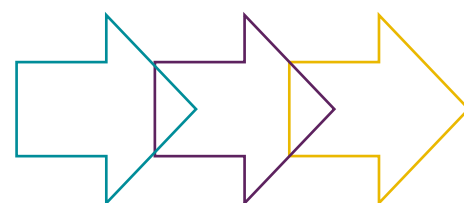
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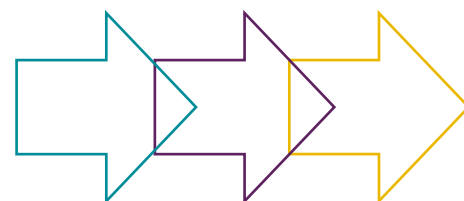


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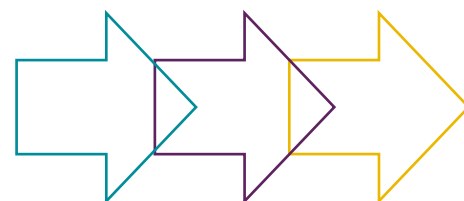
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Acronyms

BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BDT	Bangadeshi taka
BIGD	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
CLEAR	Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OPDs	organisations of persons with disabilities
PPRC	Power and Participation Research Centre
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TCB	Trading Corporation of Bangladesh
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development Programme
VWB	Vulnerable Women Benefit
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

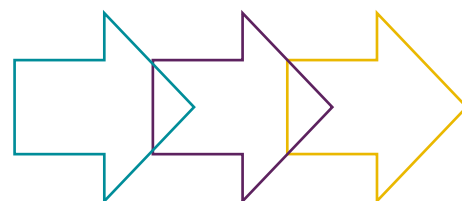


1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and the responses to it resulted in a global economic crisis that caused millions to fall into poverty, some for the first time (the ‘new poor’) and some who had previously escaped it in recent years (Rohwerder 2020). Poorer people bore the brunt of the economic upheaval caused by the pandemic and its multiple lockdowns, both as a result of the nature of their jobs and because they had a more limited ability to cope with the multiple financial shocks (Rahman *et al.* 2022). They were largely left to cope by themselves in countries such as Bangladesh because social protection coverage was limited (Rahman *et al.* 2022; Siddiquee, Faruk and Matin 2022). As a result, the pandemic exacerbated already faltering progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN 2023). Almost four years on from the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have a better understanding of the immediate and possible longer-term effects of the pandemic-induced economic shocks and subsequent crises on people’s lives, and the consequences of their coping strategies. This Synthesis Report gathers together evidence from the Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh (CLEAR) looking at multiple crises, coping strategies, and their longer-term impacts.

CLEAR was a two-and-a-half-year programme (2021–24) to support an evidence-informed Covid-19 response and recovery in Bangladesh and to share lessons from the response to better prepare for future shocks. It was led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in collaboration with the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD). The programme focused on four broad thematic areas: (1) poverty and vulnerability; (2) service delivery, accountability, and governance; (3) rights of marginalised population and disadvantaged groups; and (4) innovations. After initial scoping papers, grants were given for research projects in these areas.

CLEAR hosted an end-of-programme conference of its research in March 2024 to help shape the future knowledge agenda in Bangladesh. The CLEAR Synthesis Reports helped shape discussions under the thematic areas at the conference. The reports also connected these findings in light of the global debates on the issue, and propose a tentative knowledge agenda relevant under the theme.



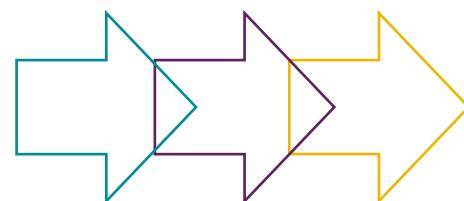
This CLEAR Synthesis Report on multiple crises, coping strategies, and their longer-term impacts in Bangladesh draws primarily from the following **CLEAR research projects**:

- **Chronicles of Hard Times in Bangladesh: Durdin-er Diaries:** A year-long qualitative panel study by Nazneen *et al.* (2024) with new-poor households during 2022–23, documenting their coping strategies, constraints, and lived experiences of governance over several months in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Becoming Poor: Social Protection Experiences of and Attitudes Towards New Urban Poor After Covid-19 in Bangladesh:** Mixed methods research by Roelen *et al.* (2024), based on six rounds of longitudinal survey data (five rounds of nationally representative secondary longitudinal survey data, collected between April 2020 and May 2022, and one round of primary survey data, administered with a sub-sample of the previous survey in low-income neighbourhoods in Dhaka and Chattogram in March 2023) and primary qualitative data looking at urban poverty and social protection in Bangladesh during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Has the Covid-19 Pandemic Worsened Multidimensional Poverty and Vulnerability? Evidence from a Unique National Longitudinal Household Survey Dataset in Bangladesh:** A longitudinal household survey by Fielding *et al.* (2024) using a baseline of 10,500 nationally representative households from 2018, another telephone survey with 5,600 of these households in 2020, and another in-person survey of around 9,000 of these households in November 2023.
- **Covid-19 and Bangladesh: Livelihoods, Coping, and Support. Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC)–BIGD Round 4 Panel Survey:** Research by Rahman *et al.* (2022), using four rounds of panel surveys at different points in 2020 and 2021 to unpack the livelihood and poverty impacts of the unfolding crisis for poor and economically vulnerable people in rural areas and urban slums, with 2,875 households surveyed in all four phases of the study.

Further evidence is drawn from the CLEAR research project **Education Watch 2023** (looking at Ahmed *et al.*'s (2023) evidence on school dropouts amongst selected cohorts between 2020 and 2022) and context is provided by the CLEAR scoping papers on social protection (Siddiquee *et al.* 2022), migration (Hossain, Khaleque and Mahmood 2022), and labour rights and working conditions (Hassan *et al.* 2022) (which involved literature reviews and some focus groups and key informant interviews).

The variety of different CLEAR research looking at the impact of the pandemic in Bangladesh found that the shock of lockdowns and

Multiple Crises, Coping Strategies, and their Longer-Term Impacts

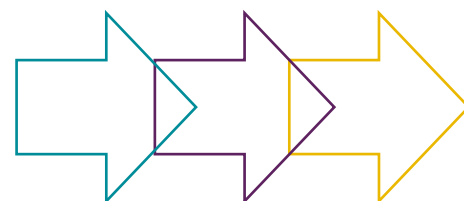


disruptions to livelihoods resulted in increased poverty, deprivation, stress, and poor mental health. Some of the research touches upon the idea of multiple crises continuing into the post-pandemic period. CLEAR research found that as a result of these multiple intersecting crises during the pandemic and afterwards, many people engaged in a number of different coping strategies for various reasons, such as that official social protection support was unavailable to them or they were ashamed to claim it; it was not enough to meet their basic needs; or because their support systems had been depleted as a result of multiple crises. Some of the people were amongst the ‘new poor’ who had suddenly lost their livelihoods but who did not qualify for support.

Some of the coping strategies people used during the pandemic that were identified in the research included cutting costs by eating less, not accessing health care, removing their children from school, selling assets, taking out loans and getting into debt, changing livelihoods, trying to access social protection, and relying on their networks. Over the course of the pandemic and afterwards, households’ resources were depleted by each crisis/shock. The effects of their negative coping strategies persist, and many are still doing worse-off than prior to the pandemic; for example, some are stuck in debt traps after taking out loans.

The coping strategies used may have a medium- to longer-term impact on people’s development, compromising their future wellbeing, preventing them from exiting multidimensional poverty, and challenging progress towards the SDGs. The long-term consequences of people’s coping strategies need to be addressed, because such coping strategies are likely to be used in any subsequent crises if better alternatives, such as comprehensive social protection, are not available.

This Synthesis Report provides an overview of the Bangladesh context (section 2); the key findings relating to people’s coping strategies and their longer-term impacts from the CLEAR research projects (section 3); the current global debates in development around the issue (section 4); and the knowledge agenda for Bangladesh (section 5).



2. Bangladesh context

Bangladesh is a lower-middle-income country, with a population of around 169.8 million according to the 2022 census, the majority of whom live in rural areas (68 per cent) (BBS 2023). Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Bangladesh was experiencing a fast-growing economy and falling poverty rates; however, despite a falling poverty rate of 3 per cent per year, many people were still living around the poverty line when the pandemic hit (Fielding *et al.* 2024).

The pandemic resulted in multiple shocks/crises for the population in Bangladesh. The government responded to the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020 with a nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus that halted all economic activities (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). This caused economic struggles that were greater than the health risks, which resulted in the government opting for a more relaxed lockdown and a gradual reopening of the economy (*ibid.*). Further lockdowns followed in 2021 as infections rose again, which affected economic recovery and poverty rates (the lockdowns were implemented with varying degrees of strictness) (Roelen *et al.* 2024).

The effects of the multiple lockdowns led to a significant increase in poverty in Bangladesh, particularly in urban areas (Roelen *et al.* 2023). Analysis of poverty dynamics across the country between February 2020 and May 2022 (Figure 1) shows considerable variations in poverty in urban and rural areas and across time. Spikes in poverty followed periods during which people struggled to cope with shocks caused by the lockdown measures that were in place at the time (Roelen *et al.* 2024). The poor became poorer and vulnerable non-poor became 'new poor' (Siddiquee *et al.* 2022).

The economic effects of the pandemic in Bangladesh were severe, with growth rates down, and an estimated 1.6 million people falling into poverty, especially in urban low-income areas, and for those working in the informal sector, women, and marginalised groups (Nazneen *et al.* 2024; Siddiquee *et al.* 2022; Hassan *et al.* 2022). Factories closed, orders were cancelled, jobs were lost, and incomes were down (Siddiquee *et al.* 2022; Hassan *et al.* 2022). The pandemic had a 'substantial adverse impact on the existing poor state of labour rights and working conditions', which left people more vulnerable during and afterwards (Hassan *et al.* 2022: 6). International migrants significantly reduced the remittances they sent home as they also experienced job loss, wage cuts, and a substantial decline in their income, and many were forced to return home, which greatly affected families who relied on their wages (Hossain *et al.* 2022; Nazneen *et al.* 2024). Within Bangladesh, there was also reverse migration from urban to rural areas (Rahman *et al.* 2022; Nazneen *et al.* 2024).

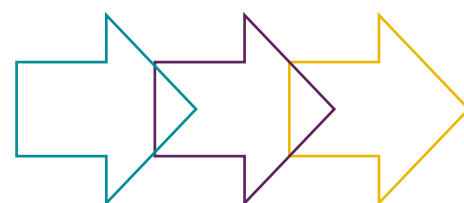
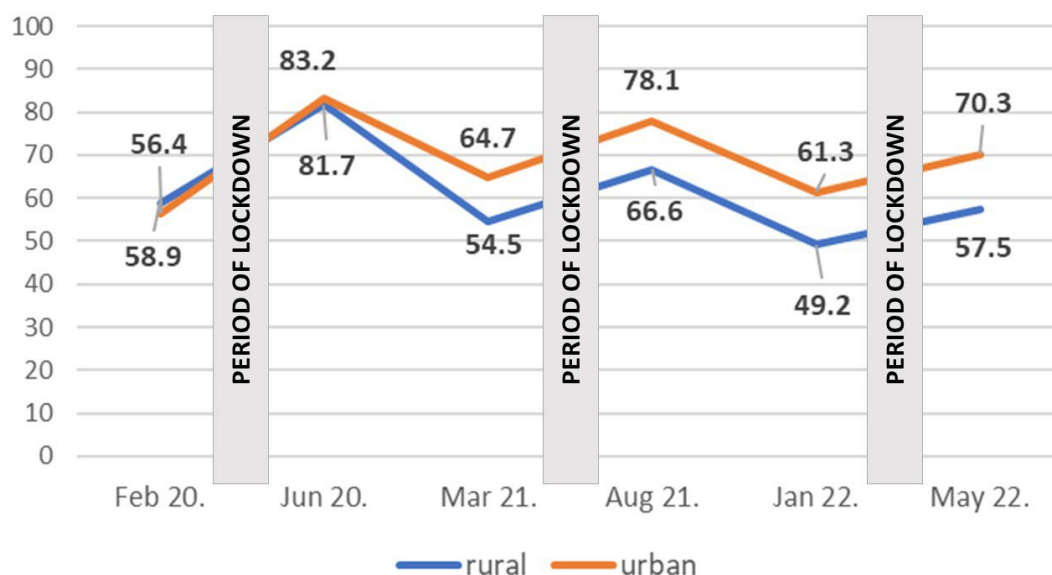


Figure 1: Poverty headcount rates from February 2020 to May 2022

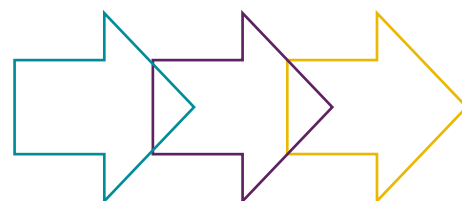


Point in time	Rural poverty rate (%)	Urban poverty rate (%)
February 2020	58.9	56.4
June 2020	81.7	83.2
March 2021	54.5	64.7
August 2021	66.6	78.1
January 2022	49.2	61.3
May 2022	57.5	70.3

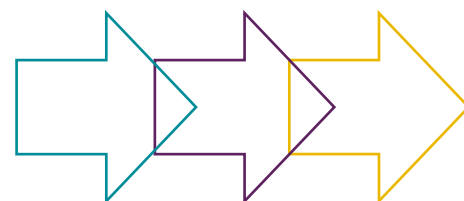
Source: Roelen *et al.* (2024: 19)

The government responded by widening coverage of the social safety nets during the pandemic in response to the impact of the first lockdown, but many poor people were still excluded from social protection programmes due to the lack of a social registry and proper implementation and distribution strategies (Siddiquee *et al.* 2022). By the time of the second lockdown (April 2021), the proportion of households receiving government social protection assistance to cope with the impacts of the pandemic had decreased (6 per cent in June 2020 and 2 per cent in August 2021) (Rahman *et al.* 2022; Siddiquee *et al.* 2022). There were also concerns about irregularities and corruption in the system (Siddiquee *et al.* 2022). As a result of these issues, ‘a large proportion of the population descended into poverty because of the absence of social protection to keep them above the poverty line’ (*ibid.*: 14).

Multiple Crises, Coping Strategies, and their Longer-Term Impacts



In the post-pandemic period, Bangladesh has faced high inflation rates as a result of a number of different crises, including the lingering effects of the pandemic, cyclones, floods, and the disruption that the Russia–Ukraine war caused to global supply chains, leading to a cost-of-living crisis (Fielding *et al.* 2024; Nazneen *et al.* 2024). The prolonged period of the pandemic and the intersecting crises since have ‘caused severe disruptions to economic activities and social services in ways that have driven downward mobility’ (Roelen *et al.* 2023: 48).



3. Key findings from the CLEAR research

A common theme coming out of much of the CLEAR research was the devastating economic impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on people living in Bangladesh, including those who had previously not lived in poverty, because of multiple shocks, combined with inadequate and depleted coping strategies and a lack of sufficient social protection support. As a result, this section begins with an overview of the evidence related to the economic crises people faced, their poverty resulting from their reduced ability to deal with these crises, and the phenomenon of the ‘new poor’.

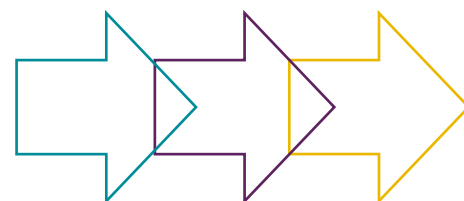
In order to survive both the pandemic and subsequent crises that Bangladesh has faced, people resorted to a number of different coping strategies which are outlined thematically below. Drawing partly from the categorisation used by Nazneen *et al.* (2024), the coping strategies can be grouped under cost-cutting strategies, financial strategies, livelihood strategies, accessing social protection, and reliance on networks. The impacts of these coping strategies have implications for progress towards the SDGs.

3.1. The impact of multiple shocks/crises: increase in poverty and the ‘new poor’

3.1.1 Economic shocks

During the pandemic and because of the multiple lockdowns, households had to cope with shocks such as reduced working hours, reduced wages, or job losses (experienced by 62 per cent of urban and 56 per cent of rural households in Fielding *et al.* 2024), as well as a loss of remittances for families of migrant workers (Fielding *et al.* 2024; Rahman *et al.* 2022; Nazneen *et al.* 2024; Hossain *et al.* 2022). At the same time, they also faced higher-than-usual prices for basic necessities (32 per cent of urban and 28 per cent of rural households) (Fielding *et al.* 2024). The income shock of the second lockdown in mid-2021 was less acute than the first in mid-2020, but as it came while people were still recovering from the negative impact of the first lockdown, it ‘seriously hampered recovery’ (Rahman *et al.* 2022: 5).

Since the pandemic, subsequent shocks have included price rises and a cost-of-living crisis because of the turmoil in the global energy market (Fielding *et al.* 2024; Roelen *et al.* 2024). In addition, unemployment in urban slums has remained persistently high (Rahman *et al.* 2022).



Many factories permanently closed during the pandemic, making it harder for people to find employment during and after the pandemic (Roelen *et al.* 2024; Nazneen *et al.* 2024).

3.1.2 The effects of the shocks and people's ability to cope in urban and rural areas

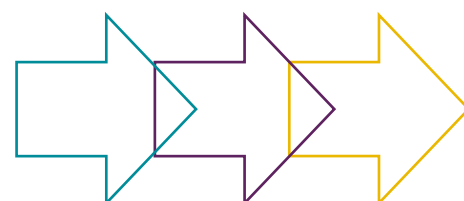
People living in urban low-income neighbourhoods experienced more drastic economic shocks than those living in rural areas and have taken longer to recover than people in rural areas (Rahman *et al.* 2022; Fielding *et al.* 2024; Roelen *et al.* 2023). For example, Rahman *et al.* (2022) found that poverty rates in rural areas in August 2021 were 10 per cent higher than before the pandemic, while in urban slums the increase in poverty was over 20 per cent. People working in the informal sector (as is often the case in urban low-income areas) were particularly affected by economic disruption caused by the pandemic, and in August 2021 were worse off than before the pandemic, as were women and the urban poor (Rahman *et al.* 2022; Faruk 2022). Roelen *et al.* (2024) found that in the early phase of the pandemic, after the first lockdown measures,¹ poverty increased by 48 per cent in urban low-income neighbourhoods, compared to 39 per cent in rural areas. In between lockdowns, poverty rates improved in rural areas and had dropped back to pre-pandemic levels a few months after the fourth period of lockdown measures in early 2022; however, it remained 25 per cent higher in urban low-income areas in May 2022, compared to February 2020 (*ibid.*).

There were some signs of recovery as time went by. Research by Fielding *et al.* (2024) found that during the pandemic, a large proportion of vulnerable non-poor households became poor. However, the majority of the respondents in Fielding *et al.*'s (2024) study were able to go back to their non-poor status by 2023.² Despite this, given the progress that had gone before, the pandemic and the subsequent cost-of living crisis have resulted in a stagnant poverty rate over a period of half a decade (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, Roelen *et al.* (2023, 2024) found that poverty rates in the cohort surveyed in March 2023 (three years after the onset of the pandemic) had dropped, but they were still higher than their pre-pandemic levels. Most people surveyed moved in and out of poverty between February 2020 and March 2023 (57 per cent) – the transitory poor; with some who were not poor prior to the pandemic, falling into poverty and not being able to escape it (9 per cent of respondents in Chattogram and 13 per cent in

¹ This overlapped with Cyclone Amphan in May 2020 (Roelen *et al.* 2024).

² In 2018, the upper poverty rate in Bangladesh was 20.6 per cent, which jumped to 41.5 per cent during the pandemic (2020 survey). In 2023, the poverty rate had come down to 20.9 per cent (Fielding *et al.* 2024).



Dhaka) – the impoverished or ‘new poor’ (Roelen *et al.* 2024). Others were persistently poor (24 per cent in Chattogram and 17 per cent in Dhaka); while 10 per cent in Chattogram and 8 per cent in Dhaka moved out of poverty since February 2020³ (*ibid.*). This indicates that people were experiencing much greater levels of precarity since the pandemic than had been previously observed, with 56 per cent of people who were not poor before the pandemic moving into poverty, and those in moderate poverty moving into extreme poverty or destitution (*ibid.*). Table 1 outlines the impact of the shocks of the pandemic lockdowns and likely impact of the cost-of-living crisis in 2023, which has kept poverty rates stagnant, and even slightly increased, between May 2022 and March 2023 (*ibid.*).

Table 1: Poverty headcount rates from February 2020 to March 2023 (including four periods of lockdown shocks)

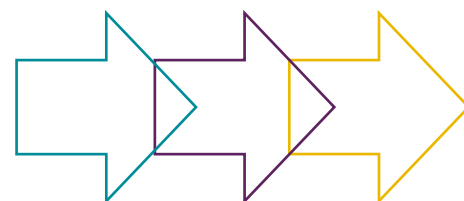
Poverty rate	Chattogram (%)	Dhaka (%)	Overall (%)
February 2020	53.8	45.3	48.9
March – April 2020	Period of lockdown		
June 2020	88.6	79.3	83.3**
March 2021	53.0	55.3	54.3
April 2021	Period of lockdown		
July 2021	Period of lockdown		
August 2021	76.5	70.4	73.0
January 2022	54.6	50.3	52.1
January – February 2022	Period of lockdown		
May 2022	65.9	60.9	63.0
March 2023	71.2	62.6	66.2

Source: Roelen *et al.* (2024: 20). Calculations based on PPRC–BIGD survey data and CLEAR Becoming Poor data (balanced sample, N=311), based on self-reported monthly income. Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Vulnerable non-poor⁴ became ‘new poor’ or ‘impoverished’ because of the effects of multiple shocks during the pandemic and the inadequacy of their coping strategies to keep them out of poverty (Rahman *et al.* 2022; Roelen *et al.* 2024). During the recovery period after the second lockdown, in August 2021, Rahman *et al.* (2022) estimated that 15 per cent of the population were ‘new poor’, while Roelen *et al.* (2024) found that 11.6 per cent of surveyed households were still impoverished in March 2023.

³ The remainder did not find themselves in poverty at any point between February 2020 and March 2023 (Roelen *et al.* 2024)

⁴ Classed by Rahman *et al.* (2022) as people who were between the upper poverty line and the inflation-adjusted median income.



The people who were now poor did not have adequate coping strategies; they were 'less likely to have the solid financial buffers – properties, savings, strong social networks – necessary to weather the income shock for such a long time and spring back out of poverty', and thus ended up stuck in poverty without external support (Rahman *et al.* 2022: 14). They struggled to escape poverty when they were faced with new shocks which reversed their recovery (*ibid.*).

3.1.3 The emotional impacts of being in poverty

An important aspect to note is the emotional consequences of being in poverty for recovering from it. Roelen *et al.* (2024: 6) note that 'Economic uncertainty and poverty are associated with stress and poor mental health, especially among women and those with lower incomes', as they struggle to make ends meet (see also Roelen *et al.* 2023). Two-thirds of those surveyed in the poorest quintile and two-thirds of women reported severe mental distress (*ibid.*). This can keep people trapped in poverty, especially when they become resigned to it (Roelen *et al.* 2024).

3.2. Coping strategies

The CLEAR research studies looked more closely at the different coping strategies households used to try and cope with multiple shocks/crises over the course of the pandemic and beyond, in their attempts to stay out of or escape from poverty. Some of these are more negative/harmful strategies which impair people's, especially children's, ability to realise their potential, enjoy their rights, and to break out of a cycle of vulnerability (Global Protection Cluster 2020). As noted above, many were not able to successfully use these coping strategies to avoid falling into poverty, whether temporarily or more permanently.

An overview provided by the Fielding *et al.* (2024) study shows the variety of coping strategies used to cope with the pandemic-induced shocks. Households coped by changing dietary patterns (25.7 per cent rural, 24.9 per cent urban), depleting savings (18.9 per cent rural, 17.9 per cent urban), borrowing (20.2 per cent rural, 16.8 per cent urban), reducing spending on health (7.8 per cent rural, 8.7 per cent urban) and reducing spending on education (4.7 per cent rural, 6.2 per cent urban) (*ibid.*). Very few of them coped by receiving government support (2.7 per cent rural, 4.3 per cent urban), although a few more coped by receiving support from non-governmental sources (6.8 per cent rural, 9.2 per cent urban) (*ibid.*; see Table 2). They were left in situations of depleted household assets/debt traps which are a risk should they then face another crisis (Fielding *et al.* 2023).

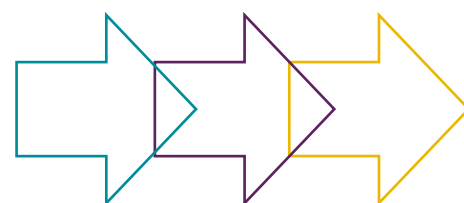


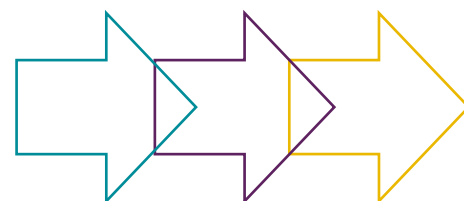
Table 2: Coping strategies used during the height of the pandemic

Coping strategies	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Changing food habit/reducing food expenditure	25.7	24.9
Depleting savings	18.9	17.9
Borrowing	20.2	16.8
Reducing spending on health	7.8	8.7
Reducing spending on education	4.7	6.2
Working for extra hours/extra work	5.4	5.7
Received government support (not conventional social security support programmes)	2.7	4.3
Receiving unconditional help (other than government)	6.8	9.2
Changing occupations or way of earning	2.6	2.5
Selling household assets or land	2.7	1.7
Other	2.6	2.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Fielding *et al.* (2024: 17), reproduced with permission.

Similarly, the most common coping strategies of the new-poor respondents in Nazneen *et al.*'s (2024) study were to borrow money, reduce consumption, and hold multiple jobs. Their strategies were based on their pre-pandemic economic status, networks, and existing social norms. They 'took on loans, switched occupations, or worked at multiple jobs or put non-working members of the household to work, and cut spending on food, schooling, health care' (*ibid.*: 99). While they tried to access social safety nets, they needed intermediaries for this, and political affiliation to the ruling party was also helpful (*ibid.*).

Fielding *et al.* (2024) also looked at household coping strategies during the post-pandemic price rises and found that households have tried to cope in similar ways as they did during the pandemic, mainly changing their



dietary habits⁵ (31.2 per cent), not being able to save (17.5 per cent), reducing non-food expenditures (15.4 per cent), borrowing (12.4 per cent), and using savings (7.8 per cent).

Sections 3.2.1–3.2.5 look in more detail at the different coping strategies (cost-cutting strategies, financial strategies, livelihood strategies, accessing social protection, and reliance on networks) and their effects. It also notes the relevant SDGs affected by the coping strategies as a way of situating the findings in the SDG debate on progress, an issue returned to in section 4.4.

3.2.1 Cost-cutting strategies

During the pandemic, and afterwards due to the high-cost-of-living crisis, households have reduced consumption and cut costs in multiple areas⁶ (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). These have tended to be in relation to reducing food consumption (e.g. protein intake), forgoing health care and medications, and decreasing education costs⁷ (see Box 1). Households surveyed by Rahman *et al.* (2022) also reduced/deferred payments for food, rent and utilities, education, and non-emergency medical costs during the first lockdown. However, at some point, these unpaid expenditures can no longer be deferred and households need to pay them despite their lower income (*ibid.*).

Forgoing health care and medications led to a deterioration in people's health and ability to work (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). The state of public health care and the cost of private health care makes it hard for people to afford good care without dipping into their savings and hindering their ability to recover to their pre-pandemic economic position, especially for those who were experiencing health problems that prevent them from working and thus recovering economically (*ibid.*).

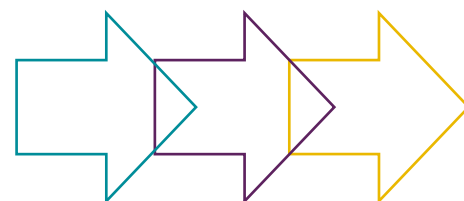
Rahman *et al.* (2022) found that after the second lockdown in 2021, the number of households skipping at least one meal a day (7 per cent) had almost reverted to the same level as those after the first lockdown (8 per cent), despite improvements during the recovery period prior to the second lockdown (2 per cent). Food and nutrition expenditure in August 2021 was 16 per cent lower in urban slums and 12 per cent lower in rural areas than pre-pandemic levels, and people were consuming less nutritious foods (*ibid.*). Rahman *et al.* noted that 'Long-term lack of critical

⁵ Fielding *et al.* (2024) found that households reduced their expenditure on essential food items such as fruits, vegetables, and proteins and relied more on carbohydrates.

⁶ One of the CLEAR scoping studies noted that families (of migrant returnees) also reduced spending on festivals, rituals, and charity (Hossain *et al.* 2022).

⁷ Such as payment for textbooks, guidebooks, educational materials, school tuition fees, and tutor salaries (Nazneen *et al.* 2024).

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food items like milk, fruits, and meat may be particularly damaging to the physical and mental growth of children, which may have long-term welfare consequences for them' (2022: 11).

Rahman *et al.* (2022) also found that a further coping strategy to reduce expenses was urban to rural migration (28 per cent of respondents and their families migrated from urban slums at some point during the pandemic) and 10 per cent still remained in rural areas in August 2021. The authors noted that 'though these reverse migrants are likely to be in distress, their motivations and aspirations do not necessarily conform to those of the pre-existing rural poor' (*ibid.*: 15).

Such coping strategies have had a detrimental impact on the following SDGs: 1: No poverty; 2: Zero hunger; 3: Good health and well-being; 4: Quality education; 5: Gender equality; 10: Reduced inequalities; and 11: Sustainable cities and communities.

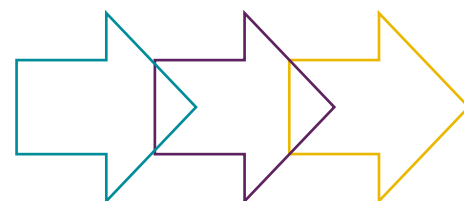
Box 1: Cutting educational costs: school dropouts

This box focuses on cost-cutting in relation to education in more detail, as this was looked at more closely in the CLEAR research than other cost-cutting strategies.

In Bangladesh, families must cover a variety of educational costs for their children's schooling, including fees for examinations, sports, school activities and special contributions, and tuition fees for those attending private primary schools and for those in secondary education (Ahmed *et al.* 2023). These expenditures were some of those that were dropped because of the financial pressures during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fielding *et al.* (2024) found that the rate of children out of school in 2023 had increased by 2.4 per cent for non-poor households since the pandemic, which they attributed to non-poor vulnerable households taking their children out of school as a coping strategy to deal with the pandemic shock. As well as children dropping out, reduction in spending on education meant that children were sometimes moved to religious educational institutions, which were cheaper, and reducing the reliance on private tutors to top up their children's education (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). The quality of education being received was thus of lower quality.

Education Watch 2023, the study by Ahmed *et al.* (2023: 32), found that '4.5 per cent of primary students and 6 per cent of secondary-level students who were in school at the onset of the pandemic in 2020 are no



longer in any type of school in 2022',⁸ most likely because of the Covid-19 pandemic. More boys were out of school than girls, although this difference was more pronounced at primary level than at secondary, even though total dropout levels were higher in secondary school (*ibid.*). A significant number of the girls of secondary age who are out of school have been forced into child marriage (*ibid.*; Nazneen *et al.* 2024).

A significant percentage of those who had dropped out (76.6 per cent at the primary and 59.8 per cent at the secondary level) attributed it to poverty and financial hardships (Ahmed *et al.* 2023). This was also linked to another reason for dropouts, as 'engagement in income-generating activities or child labour was a reason for dropout for 13.7 per cent of primary level and 21.1 per cent of secondary level students', while others had to help with household chores (20.7 per cent of primary level and 10.2 per cent of secondary level) (*ibid.*: 35). The money earned by these children was often essential to their family's survival.

Many children in Ahmed *et al.*'s (2023) study were not interested in returning to school, and for those who were, the biggest incentive to return to education would be if financial support was available (77.3 per cent of those who would consider returning).

Reduced spending on education and school dropouts has contributed to learning losses; further gaps in basic literacy and numeracy skills; potential setbacks in education quality equity, and inclusion objectives; and can have a long-term impact of children's life trajectory (*ibid.*).

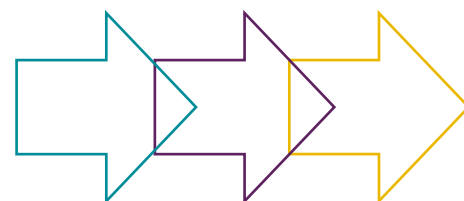
Source: Author's own.

3.2.2 Financial strategies: loans and borrowing goods

In order to survive the pandemic lockdowns and economic downturn, households depleted their savings and sold their assets (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). People's savings were considerably depleted by the first lockdown (Rahman *et al.* 2022). A comparison of the aftermath of the first lockdown with that of the second lockdown in mid-2021 by Rahman *et al.* shows that 'use of savings has gone down from 15 per cent to 3 per cent, but at the

⁸ These figures are for the student cohort of 2020 for grades 2 and 6 who were not in school in 2023, rather than the total dropout for primary and secondary level which are higher: 14.15 per cent in 2021 at the primary level, 36 per cent for secondary level (grades 6–10) and 22.7 per cent at the higher secondary (grades 11–12) (Ahmed *et al.* 2023).

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same time, the use of loans and shopkeepers' credit has gone up, which has implications for longer-term financial capacity' (2022: 7).

The new-poor respondents in Nazneen *et al.*'s (2024) study depended on loans to survive the pandemic (cash and credit from grocers), and used loans afterwards to invest in business, fund migration, or mitigate health shocks: 'When financial assistance from their immediate networks was unavailable, some households turned to local moneylenders, pawning valuable goods like gold ornaments as collateral' (*ibid.*: 37).

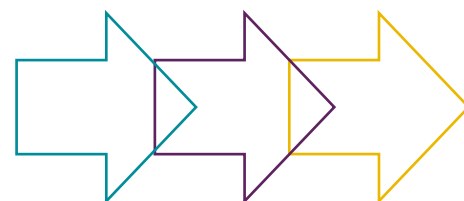
A difficulty some faced was that many were small businessmen who usually bought their goods on credit and repaid after they had made a sale, but during the pandemic 'many of them sold these goods without making a profit, sold them on credit or used them up for their own consumptions, all of which impacted the repayment arrangements that they had with the investor' (*ibid.*: 27). People were often accessing multiple loans from microfinance institutions, and some were using them to repay other recurring loans, as well as investing in their businesses, which put them at risk of falling into a debt trap (*ibid.*).

Nazneen *et al.* (2024) found that there was a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities for the rural and peri-urban households, who also lacked access to credit from banks, which meant they were reliant on microfinance institutions and family networks for the loans they needed for survival and recovery. Informal actors providing quick loans with very high interest rates were the dominant providers of loans (*ibid.*).

Households who had to use their capital during the pandemic to survive and did not have money left to invest in their business often ended up having to shut it down or were stuck in a debt trap where they were 'suffering having to pay a good amount of money in weekly instalments and therefore not being able to improve their condition' (Nazneen *et al.* 2024: 65) or trapped in patron–client relationships with *mohajons* (local money lenders). Respondents mentioned feeling stuck and unable to escape their new economic situation. Nazneen *et al.* (2024) found that being stuck in a debt trap is more prevalent to households not recovering – regardless of being never poor or vulnerable non-poor before the pandemic (2024), and that 'debt traps were closely interconnected with depletion of capital' (*ibid.*: 64), as due to lack of capital, people did not have enough profits to pay off their loans. People were taking loans to pay off other loans, and not earning enough to pay them all off.

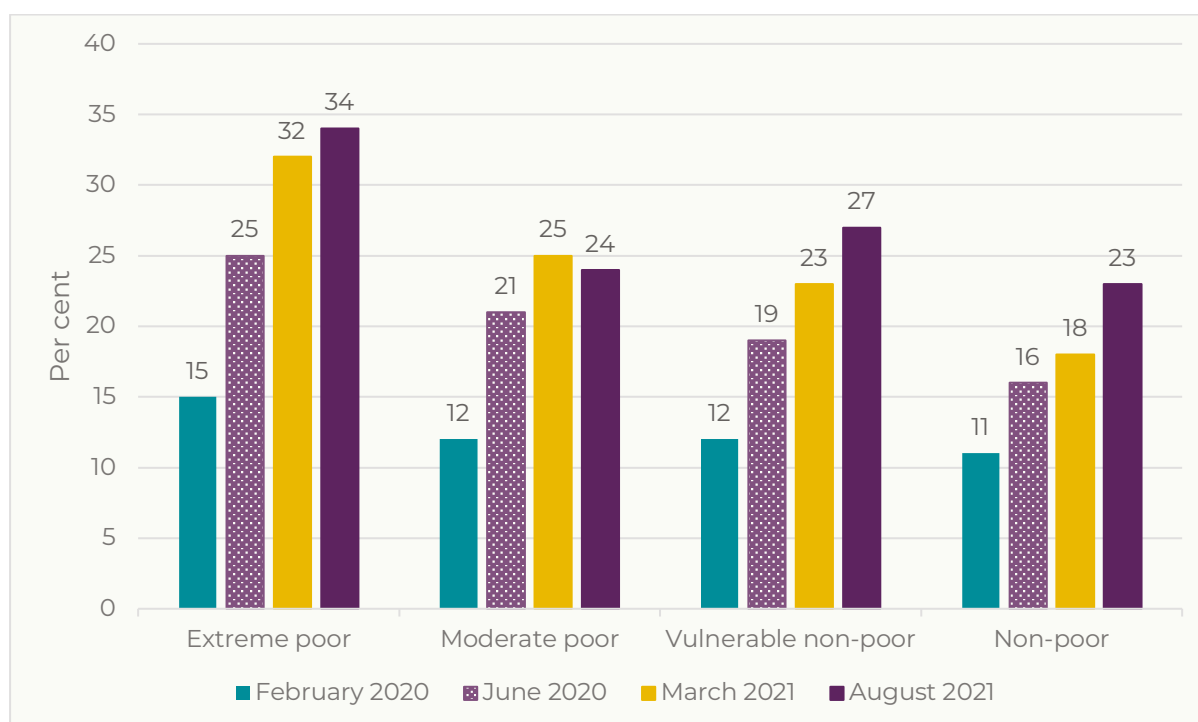
There was a consistent rise in outstanding loans in each phase of Rahman *et al.*'s (2022) survey for all income groups as people ran out of other means of coping, with most borrowing to cover either daily consumption expenses or medical bills. Between February 2020 and August 2021,

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'outstanding loans as a percentage of annual income (2020), based on monthly income in February 2020, more than doubled for each income group – extreme poor, moderate poor, vulnerable non-poor, and non-poor' (*ibid.*: 11–12; see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Outstanding loan as a percentage of annual income



Income group	Extreme poor	Moderate poor	Vulnerable non-poor	Non-poor
February 2020	15	12	12	11
June 2020	25	21	19	16
March 2021	32	25	23	18
August 2021	34	24	27	23

Source: Rahman *et al.* (2022: 12). Copyright © UNU-WIDER, reproduced under **UNU-WIDER fair use policy**.

Roelen *et al.* (2024) also found that during lockdown, almost everyone had debts and almost nine out of ten households in Dhaka and Chattogram still had outstanding loans of some sort in March 2023, as people struggled to pay-off loans accumulated during the pandemic (see Table 3).

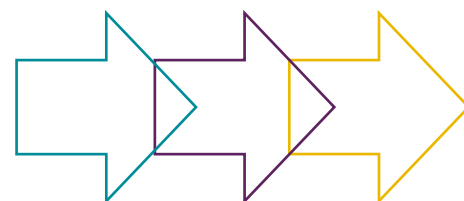


Table 3: Outstanding loans between March 2021 and March 2023

Anyone in household has any debt	Chattogram (%)	Dhaka (%)	Overall (%)
March 2021	78.8	77.7	78.1
August 2021	85.6	86.0	85.9
May 2022	75.8	78.2	77.2
March 2023	85.6	88.3	87.1

Source: Roelen *et al.* (2024: 23). Calculations based on PPRC–BIGD survey data and CLEAR Becoming Poor data (balanced sample, N=311), based on self-reported monthly income. Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

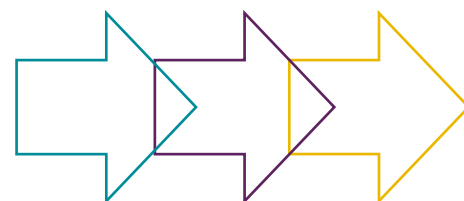
The cost-of-living crisis after the pandemic has made the prevalence of debt worse (Roelen *et al.* 2024). ‘While loans can offer crucial support to managing livelihoods, they can also lead to unsustainable economic insecurity’ as people can be pushed further down the spiral of indebtedness (Roelen *et al.* 2023: 22).

Such coping strategies have had a detrimental impact on the following SDGs: 1: No poverty; and 8: Decent work and economic growth.

3.2.3 Livelihood strategies

The new poor in Nazneen *et al.*'s (2024: 27) study responded to their lost livelihoods in the pandemic by ‘searching for alternative livelihoods, shifting occupations, and taking up multiple jobs’, some more easily than others due to more transferable skills. The work they ended up doing tended to be more short term or part time, resulting in less stable incomes, and they had less choice over what to do as their needs were more geared towards survival. This continued after the pandemic as a result of the prolonged economic downturn (*ibid.*). Rahman *et al.* (2022) also found that those who had found work were generally now working in less skilled or less secure, more precarious and vulnerable work compared with before the pandemic (see also Roelen *et al.* 2024). People living in poverty and people living in urban low-income neighbourhoods also experience stigma and discrimination that can prevent them getting education or work which could help lift them out of poverty (Roelen *et al.* 2023, 2024).

In some households, members who had previously not been engaged in income-generating activities, including women, retired members and youth, started to work as part of the family’s coping strategy (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). Some of them continued to work after the pandemic to deal with the high cost of living (*ibid.*). Some families also coped through the use of child labour, taking children out of school to supplement their



household's income to survive (Rahman *et al.* 2022; Ahmed *et al.* 2023). Rahman *et al.* (2022) found that 8 per cent of school-aged boys were engaging in income-generating activities, likely due to the livelihood pressures of the pandemic, and thus were at the highest risk of learning loss (see also Faruk 2022; and Box 1).

However, despite some families sending out previously non-working members to earn income, women were often still restricted from working outside the home by their husbands or fathers as it was a matter of shame for them due to patriarchal gender norms (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). This prevents women from being able to earn extra income to help their family's situation.

The changed economic landscape after the pandemic meant that people were engaging in much lower income-earning activities than prior to it and had not returned to their previous economic condition, especially in a context of high prices for basic necessities (*ibid.*). Roelen *et al.* also note that 'The combination of the pandemic's hollowing out of household resilience through depleted assets, continuing inflationary pressures, and inability to earn ample income creates intersecting supply- and demand-side crises that lead into insecure and volatile livelihoods' (2024: 23). As a result, life has become tougher for people and made it harder for them to recover.

Such coping strategies have had a detrimental impact on the following SDGs: 1: No poverty; 4: Quality education; 5: Gender equality; 8: Decent work and economic growth; 10: Reduced inequalities; and 11: Sustainable cities and communities.

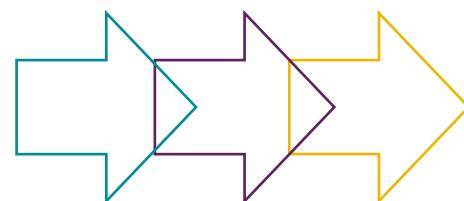
3.2.4 Accessing social protection

Although there was an expansion of social protection during the pandemic,⁹ government-provided social protection was patchy,¹⁰ inadequate, and difficult to access, although many people living in urban areas did receive some form of emergency relief from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local elites, and friends and family (Roelen *et al.* 2023, 2024; Nazneen *et al.* 2024; Siddiquee *et al.* 2022). One widely used form of assistance in low-income neighbourhoods was government-run food trucks selling food items at cheaper prices, although there were issues with the queueing system (Roelen *et al.* 2024). However, Rahman *et al.* (2022) found that the number of households that received any kind of

⁹ Around half of the respondents in Nazneen *et al.*'s (2024: 29) study successfully accessed programmes such as: 'Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) cards, Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) cards, block grants (Bangadeshi taka (BDT) 2,500 through bKash), Vulnerable Group Development Programme (VGD) card, agricultural card, and relief from the commissioner's office (provided on as a one-off payment)'.

¹⁰ There are more social protection programmes in rural than urban areas (Roelen *et al.* 2024).

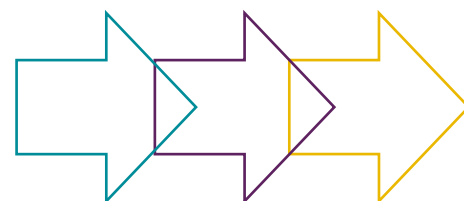
Multiple Crises, Coping Strategies, and their Longer-Term Impacts



support from the government or other sources went down considerably from the first lockdown to the second (23 per cent compared to 45 per cent), particularly in urban slums (31 per cent compared to 64 per cent). Fielding *et al.* (2024) also looked at access to social security programmes during the pandemic and found that only 21 per cent of surveyed households had received any support, while those who had not received it felt that this was due to improper selection processes, or that even though their name was on the list, they did not receive any assistance.

Lack of social assistance, both formal and informal, also hindered people's experience of the pandemic and got in the way of their recovery (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). People who had not been considered poor prior to the pandemic were considered ineligible for government social protection during the pandemic shocks (*ibid.*). They also felt great shame about accessing social protection which put some of them off accessing it despite their need (*ibid.*). For those in Roelen *et al.*'s (2023, 2024) study, assistance from the government was seen as less shameful than asking others for help because people see the government as having a responsibility to help reduce poverty, and therefore accessing social protection is exercising a right. However, the way in which it is provided (for example, having to queue in public) can be stigmatising and off-putting for those who need it, especially those who did not normally need external support before the pandemic (Roelen *et al.* 2023, 2024). Roelen *et al.* note that 'Stigma, negative attitudes, and pejorative treatment of people on low incomes receiving relief can reinforce the psychosocial poverty trap' (2024: 10–11).

Connections to individuals in position of power were needed to access support provided by community leaders and the government, meaning that the most marginalised were excluded from social assistance (Roelen *et al.* 2023, 2024; Nazneen *et al.* 2024). In Nazneen *et al.*'s (2024) study, political affiliation was found to be a major determinant for inclusion in the recipient lists for social protection, with respondents who were closely involved in politics able to access multiple forms of social assistance, while another household in the same village (an opposition party supporter) got nothing. In addition, corruption was identified as a problem, with some respondents 'offer[ing] "financial incentives" to the representatives directly or through the intermediaries to facilitate the acquisition of a safety net card' (*ibid.*: 47). People who lacked the relevant networks were unable to access social protection, including migrant workers and those connected to opposition parties. The authors also noted that 'Respondents also accused some local representatives of corruption, favouritism, and nepotism' (2024: 69). Some of the respondents in Nazneen *et al.*'s study did voice their concerns about access to social protection to local government



representatives, but these tended to happen at an individual rather than collective level.

The lack of access to social protection during the pandemic has had long-lasting consequences. The respondents in Nazneen *et al.*'s study (*ibid.*) had very negative attitudes (lack of trust and low expectations) towards their local government representatives three years later because of their exclusion from social protection programmes. They also do not believe that the government will provide people like them with low-interest long-term loans to help with their pandemic recovery.

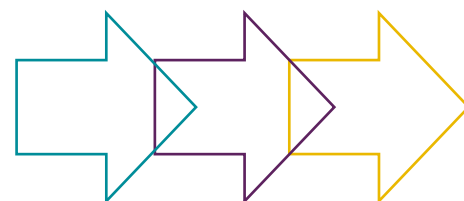
Problems accessing adequate social protection have had a detrimental impact on the following SDGs: 1: No poverty; 10: Reduced inequalities; 11: Sustainable cities and communities; and 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions.

3.2.5 Accessing assistance from networks

Nazneen *et al.* (2024) found that people's networks were an important part of coping strategies and the recovery of the new-poor households, especially their immediate and extended family, their neighbours, local elites (especially in urban and rural locations but not in the peri-urban location), local government actors, the ruling party, and NGOs.

Kinship networks were an important source of cash and in-kind support, as well as loans, which were important for coping with livelihood shocks (*ibid.*). However, asking for help from family, friends, and community members was found by Roelen *et al.* (2023, 2024) to be associated with high levels of shame, especially for those who were not poor before the pandemic, with an awareness that friends and family also suffer economic hardship and might be unable to help. Nazneen *et al.* (2024) also found that shame around poverty was a constraint, with new-poor households feeling ashamed to ask for help as there was stigma around being poor and that these households were perceived to be solvent. Nazneen *et al.* noted that 'Constraints associated with honour and shame were mostly visible for households who were never poor before the pandemic, compared to vulnerable non-poor households' (2024: 71). People were concerned for their family's image as they had previously not needed assistance – for people who were middle class but had become newly poor, this applied to both social assistance and asking for assistance from their relatives (*ibid.*).

Being able to borrow products on credit despite their inability to make regular payments, as a result of being part of market networks, was crucial for small business owners to earn a living during the pandemic. The new poor households also used their networks to find work or set up new



businesses. Lack of networks can get in the way of accessing loans as people lack guarantors (*ibid.*).

As noted above, networks or connections to local representatives were also found to be important in accessing social protection during the pandemic, as it was ‘widely acknowledged that without direct contact with the local representatives through “appropriate” channels, obtaining a card on time would be nearly impossible’ (*ibid.*: 57).

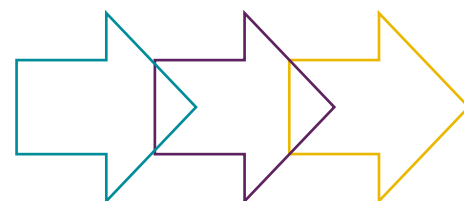
Networks were linked to people’s pre-pandemic economic status, and those who were ‘never poor’ tended to have support from a wide range of networks compared to the vulnerable non-poor households. The vulnerable non-poor were also less likely to have access to formal actors and market networks, and were more likely to depend on the support of neighbours and local elites than the ‘never poor’ (*ibid.*).

However, the collective nature of the pandemic meant that people’s usual coping strategies of ‘turn[ing] to their families, wider informal social networks, and government resources, were inadequate, as these support structures were themselves severely strained: everyone was affected’ (*ibid.*: 14). Price hikes and high inflation, for example, have eroded the capacity of informal support structures to continue to provide support to those who need it (Roelen *et al.* 2023). People who used to rely on relatives for support also faced difficulties because their relatives were also negatively affected by the economic situation caused by the pandemic and were no longer able to support them (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). Or they were the ones their family relied on, so when they themselves were in trouble, there were no relatives they could turn to for help (*ibid.*).

3.3. Recovery trajectories across crises and people’s coping strategies

Looking specifically at how households have recovered or not over the course of the pandemic, the CLEAR studies found a mixed picture, with some households unable to use their coping strategies to escape poverty. The multiple shocks/crises people experienced during the pandemic and after has left many others with lingering problems and depleted positive coping strategies, which leaves households insecure and at risk of utilising negative coping strategies and falling into/further into poverty should another shock/crisis hit.

The new-poor household recovery process has been adversely affected by a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities, limited state support, and depletion of support networks among friends and family, meaning many have been trapped in poverty as their usual coping strategies are



ineffective (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). Roelen *et al.* found that ‘despite a recovery in poverty rates to near pre-pandemic levels, households face reduced socioeconomic resilience, depleted savings, accumulated debt, price hikes, and limited work opportunities’ (2023: 2). People living in urban low-income neighbourhoods are increasingly reliant on insecure and often poorly paid occupations because better paid or more secure forms of employment have become scarcer after the pandemic and economic crises (Roelen *et al.* 2023, 2024). Those most likely to not be engaged in any type of income-generating activity are women (90 per cent compared to 10 per cent of men) (Roelen *et al.* 2024).

While the poorer sections of society have been resilient in the face of multiple shocks, it has been at the expense of deepening vulnerability, with ‘higher deployment of family labour [including child labour] put into vulnerable and lower-income occupations, rising expenditure burdens, eroding financial capacity, [higher debt, lower nutrition], and token social support or protection’ (Rahman *et al.* 2022: 15; Faruk 2022).

Bangladesh’s social security programmes are not broad enough and do not provide adequate support for all poor, new-poor, urban-poor households residing in slums or the vulnerable-poor population of Bangladesh (Fielding *et al.* 2024). Therefore, the state’s role in assisting households to bounce back after falling into poverty was limited (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). Roelen *et al.* note that ‘Having been unable to build up economic resilience and faced with high levels of precarity, the lack of access to social protection leaves urban residents in low-income neighbourhoods highly exposed to shocks and renewed waves of impoverishment’ (2023: 3). Such residents feel that they have not ‘managed to recuperate’ or that they are ‘still suffering a deficit’ and are ‘under a debt burden’ (Roelen *et al.* 2024: 24). Households in Nazneen *et al.*’s (2024) study also experienced a debt burden that they were struggling to repay and recover.

3.3.1. Differing recovery trajectories

Nazneen *et al.* (2024) looked at the recovery trajectories of people who had never been poor before the pandemic, compared to those who had been transient poor before the pandemic to analyse how they were doing after the multiple crises of the pandemic (see Table 4).

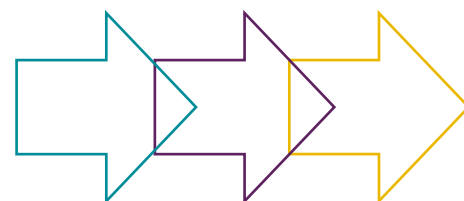


Table 4: Categorisation of households pre- and post-pandemic

	Never poor	Vulnerable non-poor
Recovering	Thriving (13)	Reviving (4)
Stuck	Surviving (6)	Sinking (16)

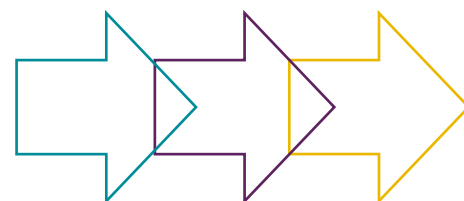
Source: Nazneen *et al.* (2024: 81)

Looking at the differences between the new poor of the pandemic, Nazneen *et al.* (2024) found that most of their households who were ‘never poor’ before the pandemic were recovering after becoming ‘new poor’ during the pandemic. They had a variety of coping strategies they could use such as ‘reducing costs (in consumption, education, health, etc.), utilising assets and savings, utilising networks, taking loans from different sources (NGOs, relatives, banks, etc.), maintaining multiple livelihoods, and shifting occupation’ (*ibid.*: 85). As they started from a better financial position, their assets and savings tended to be greater, allowing them to use them to recover and not just survive like those who had not yet recovered. They tended to have very strong networks which supported their recovery: ‘Therefore, although these households used strategies to survive the crisis like the other groups, their greater amount of assets and stronger, active networks resulted in much more effective recovery’ (*ibid.*: 86). People who had never been poor were more able to recover as they had stronger family networks and affiliations with the ruling party and government officials that most vulnerable non-poor lacked.

Some of the never-poor households pre-pandemic who were not in recovery and still stuck in poverty post-pandemic, faced health-related constraints and debt traps (*ibid.*). Others lacked strong networks or were only able to use them for survival rather than recovery. Some felt a sense of shame which stopped them from asking for help (*ibid.*).

Nazneen *et al.* found fewer vulnerable non-poor families who were recovering post-pandemic, but those who were also ‘took loans, had multiple jobs, reduced costs and used networks’ but lacked the savings and assets of the never-poor groups (2024: 93). They were located in urban areas and had access to strong networks which provided them with assistance. Being vulnerable non-poor meant that they ‘knew the pathways for accessing social protection and loans as they had done all this before or at least had the knowledge’ (*ibid.*: 93) and there was less

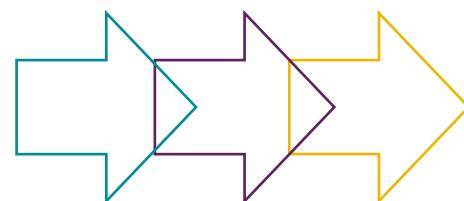
Multiple Crises, Coping Strategies, and their Longer-Term Impacts



middle-class shame about accessing assistance and they were more easily considered eligible by social assistance providers during the pandemic.

There was also a bigger group of vulnerable non-poor who were not recovering from the economic effects of the pandemic. They started the pandemic with a vulnerable financial status, instability of income, and debt, and the pandemic made their livelihoods unstable and they had to rely on the different coping strategies for survival and shock absorption (*ibid.*). They sold assets, depleted capital, took loans they could not repay, and ended up falling into debt traps. Their family and community networks were weaker, and they lacked access to market and government networks: 'The socioeconomic resilience of the vulnerable non-poor households has weakened as they were hit by multiple shocks and their support networks among family and friends were depleted' (*ibid.*: 99).

Despite households using the same strategies as each other, the effects differed as they did not necessarily have the same power or starting point (e.g. households had different levels of savings to use or were able to access different amounts of credit). Nazneen *et al.* (2024) concluded that coping strategies are shaped by people's pre-crisis economic status, networks, political affiliations, and existing social norms. Therefore, if these are depleted by a previous crisis, this will influence their ability to cope when the next crisis arrives.



4. Link to global debates

The CLEAR research findings about multiple crises, coping strategies, and their longer-term impacts links in with other existing and emerging evidence on this topic. This section goes on to outline some of the evidence about coping strategies from other Bangladesh research about the Covid-19 pandemic and previous crises; evidence about coping strategies during the pandemic from other contexts; evidence about coping strategies from other global crises; and finishes by looking at the pandemic, coping strategies, and meeting the SDGs (focusing on Bangladesh), linking back to the CLEAR research findings about coping strategies.

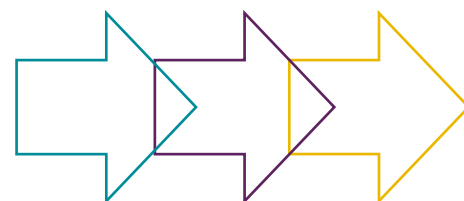
4.1. Evidence about coping strategies from other Bangladesh research

Looking at other evidence about people's coping strategies coming out of research in Bangladesh, similar concerns about the impacts of coping strategies emerge, both in relation to the crises of the Covid-19 pandemic, and earlier crises Bangladesh has faced. During the pandemic, people with disabilities, women, and child labourers were using similar coping strategies as those used by the CLEAR research participants, as described in the following sections. These research projects also found that those who were better off prior to the pandemic were able to cope better; people did not have adequate access to social protection; social networks helped with access to assistance; support had decreased over time; and people were worried about surviving further shocks as their resources had been depleted. None of these studies had taken as long a longitudinal approach as some of the CLEAR studies, so the extent of this depletion of coping strategies and the impact of that was not as clear.

The evidence coming from prior crises (floods, global fuel, food, and financial) in Bangladesh also noted issues emerging in the CLEAR research such as the lingering impact of debt; the negative immediate and likely longer-term impacts of people's coping strategies; the problems with informal assistance when everyone was affected by the crises; the inadequacy of social protection programmes; and the problems with expecting people to be able to continue coping with future crises.

4.1.1 People with disabilities' coping strategies during the pandemic

Qualitative studies looking at the experiences of people with disabilities in Bangladesh found that they coped by getting help from family and friends

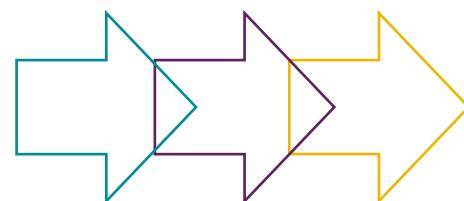


(where available as they were also struggling); using up their savings or business capital; selling assets; taking out loans; or moving to rural areas (Shaw *et al.* 2021; Rohwerder *et al.* 2021). They were often unable to access Covid-19-specific social assistance and the usual assistance they received was insufficient for basic needs, irregular or provided late, and corruption was a concern (Shaw *et al.* 2021; Rohwerder *et al.* 2021). Some received some support from international and local NGOs and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), but it had decreased over time (Rohwerder *et al.* 2021).

The studies, which took place during the first lockdown and in the recovery period before the second lockdown, found that people with disabilities and their families were struggling to recover and were very worried about being able to repay the debt they had taken on to survive (Shaw *et al.* 2021; Rohwerder *et al.* 2021). Their coping strategies, such as taking out loans or using up business capital, held people back from restarting their livelihoods after the first lockdown (Rohwerder *et al.* 2021). Those who were able to work again were working fewer hours and for lower wages (*ibid.*). Participants were worried about surviving the second lockdown as they had used up their savings and resources during the first lockdown (*ibid.*).

4.1.2 Women's coping strategies during the pandemic

Qualitative studies looking at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women working in the ready-made garment industry or as domestic workers found that the loss of their jobs was devastating, especially for domestic workers who were sole earners (Kabeer *et al.* 2021, 2022). They coped by reducing food consumption (quantity and quality – more so for domestic workers than factory workers); using up savings; delaying rent payments; returning to their villages (although this would make finding future work in the city harder); sending their children back to the village; foraging (domestic workers who returned to villages); borrowing money; taking out loans (factory workers); buying on credit; begging (domestic workers); child labour; some government support, some NGO support, and some informal support from employers, relatives, or affluent persons of the community (Kabeer *et al.* 2021, 2022). Kabeer *et al.* noted that 'the most valuable form of social capital to access government support were contacts with the local party leaders' (2021: 31). Some women working in factories continued to receive their salary, but this was only the case for some who worked for larger, registered factories, while those in small, unregistered factories suffered the same fate as informal workers (Kabeer *et al.* 2022). Channels of support petered out after the first lockdown, despite domestic workers struggling to rebuild their livelihoods when it lifted (Kabeer *et al.* 2021).



4.1.3 Child labourers' coping strategies during the pandemic

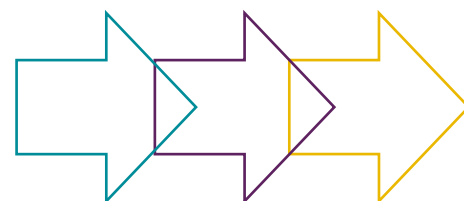
The Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) project, a participatory project looking at child labour, found that the Covid-19 crisis led to children who were already working losing employment, children discontinuing education, financial crises, and debt (Sayem *et al.* 2023). The financial situation caused by the pandemic meant that children who had not worked beforehand were forced to work to help their family survive and once they are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, their problems are compounded. Other coping strategies mentioned by children included migrating back to their villages, selling household furniture, using any savings they had, eating fewer meals, not paying rent, and being withdrawn from education. Government support was described as inadequate (*ibid.*).

4.1.4 Coping strategies during floods and the global food, fuel, and financial crises

Looking at past crises experienced in Bangladesh, we can see similar concerns about the short- and long-term negative consequences of people's coping strategies. After the 1998 floods which covered two-thirds of Bangladesh, del Ninno, Dorosh and Smith (2003) found that households' major coping strategy had been to borrow from private sector sources. However, 15 months after the flood, 'household debts still averaged 146 per cent of one month's average consumption for the 64.2 per cent of flood-exposed households in the bottom 40 per cent of the expenditure distribution who were in debt' (*ibid.*: 1235). The flood also had a long-term negative impact on vulnerable pre-school children's nutritional status.

Rashid, Hasan and Hossain (2012) looked at the impacts of the global food, fuel, and financial crises of 2008–11 in Bangladesh on people's lives and how they coped, and found that people coped by curbing spending on food (changing food shopping habits, reducing the quality and diversity of food, women eating last in some households, foraging); cutting down on expenses such as transport, communications, clothes, and social activities to be able to spend more on food; reduced spending on health and education; diversifying their livelihoods; child labour; migration; selling assets; going into debt;¹¹ and relying on informal safety nets (although this was reduced as the relatively affluent had also been hit by the crises and more people were asking for help).

¹¹ Microcredit-lending NGOs were seen by respondents as competitive lenders but tough creditors, expecting payments even when households could not afford to eat (Rashid *et al.* 2012).



The social protection provided by the government during this time was ‘too small relative to people’s needs: households were limited in the amount of subsidised rice they were permitted to buy, and recipients of old age and widow’s allowances complained that monthly payments of Bangladeshi Taka 200–300 (about US\$3) were insufficient to cover their food expenditures’ and the social protection coverage did not protect all those seriously affected by the crises (Rashid *et al.* 2012: 94). Rashid *et al.* (2012) conclude by pointing out that celebration of the resilience of poor Bangladeshis in the face of crises is problematic, as such resilience has its costs for their wellbeing, and it would be better if they were protected against the need to cope on their own before their resources get too depleted.

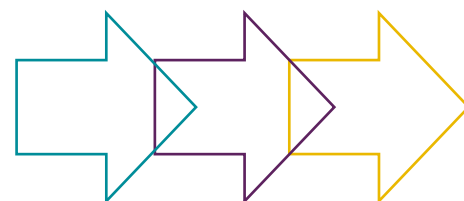
4.2. Evidence about coping strategies during the pandemic from other contexts

A variety of other studies also looked at people’s coping strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic across the world. Looking briefly at some of them we can see that similar coping strategies as from the CLEAR studies emerge, including dietary modification, using up savings, borrowing money (from family, friends, private lenders, or banks), selling assets, returning to rural locations, reducing consumption and spending on health and education, and some increased access to public social protection programmes (Giovanis and Ozdamar 2023; Berdegué *et al.* 2024; WIEGO 2022).

The studies also point to some of the themes emerging from the CLEAR findings around coping strategies and their longer-term impacts: that how you cope depends on your situation prior to the crisis (which also has an impact then on subsequent crises); coping strategies can have immediate and long-term implications for wellbeing; that people use up savings and then need to rely on loans if further shocks occur, which can trap them in poverty; that people’s coping strategies can cause them distress, which can have long-term implications for people’s ability to escape poverty; and that just because households may cope with initial shocks, it does not mean they will be able to continue to do so.

For example, Berdegué *et al.* (2024) studied food security and coping strategies among households in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico who had experienced a series of shocks over a short space of time, including the Covid-19 pandemic, having already been weakened by economic stagnation and the social deterioration experienced in the previous decade, which made it harder for them to return to pre-pandemic levels of food security. Households starting with more wealth

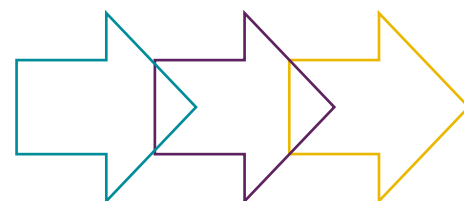
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and assets were better able to cope with the shocks and had higher levels of food security. The use of savings and the sale of assets allowed households to mitigate the effect of current shocks, but it increases their vulnerability to future shocks in the short and long term (*ibid.*). Berdegué *et al.* suggest that ‘Surely there is a limit to the number of successive shocks that these households can resist, or the efficacy with which they can do so, when little by little they are exhausting their physical, human and financial capital’ (2024: 9).

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing’s (WIEGO 2022) longitudinal study of nearly 2,000 informal workers in 11 cities around the world found that recovery for informal workers was slow, especially for women, and the coping strategies they were using had immediate and long-term implications for wellbeing. The crisis caused by the pandemic forced workers into damaging survival strategies: ‘52 per cent of respondents drew down on their savings, 46 per cent borrowed money, and 17 per cent sold or pawned assets – all strategies that can entrap households in poverty’ (*ibid.*: 2). Most (82 per cent) of respondents who had used their savings since the beginning of the pandemic were not able to replace any of them by mid-2021 (*ibid.*). WIEGO noted that ‘whereas workers were more likely to draw down savings than to borrow during the first three months of the crisis, this reversed over the next 12 months, presumably because they had already depleted their savings’ (2022: 31). Being in debt and delaying payments on rent, utility, or loan instalments, created a mental toll, worries, and threats of eviction or harm from lenders. Selling assets can also threaten a worker’s ability to earn their way out of debt and poverty (*ibid.*). In addition, their reductions in consumption, especially food and utility payments, and skipping medical treatment have both immediate and long-term implications for personal and household wellbeing. The struggle to cope and the undesirable trade-offs people had to make, strongly contributed to ‘the deterioration of workers’ mental and emotional health’ (*ibid.*: 35).

Looking at the Economic Research Forum Covid-19 Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Monitor Surveys for Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, Giovanis and Ozdamar (2023) found that borrowing from banks and selling assets resulted in the highest wellbeing costs. Unemployment, income losses, and debt have negative impacts on mental health outcomes and psychological wellbeing, creating sources of stress and depression. Giovanis and Ozdamar note that this is especially important for the children in the family as ‘young people from low-income families or those who experienced adversity as children are more likely to be in a vulnerable financial and psychological position as adults’ (2023: 2). They also note that ‘it would be a wrong assumption that households are adequately



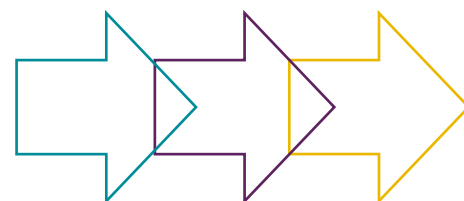
protected against a given shock if doing so requires adopting coping means that could eventually compromise their future well-being' (*ibid.*: 3).

4.3. Evidence about coping strategies from other global crises

Turning now to evidence from previous global crises and people's coping strategies and their longer-term implications, we see similar themes arise again as in the CLEAR research. Much of it comes out of the global fuel, food, and financial crises around 2008–11 (UNDP and UNICEF 2012; Mukherjee and Nayyar 2011; Heltberg *et al.* 2012b; Ötker-Robe and Podpiera 2013). Once again, we can see similar coping strategies and that multiple common crises mean that informal coping mechanisms are weakened; that weak social capital makes you more vulnerable; that some coping strategies make people more vulnerable and have detrimental short- and longer-term developmental impacts, making it harder to escape poverty traps; existing social protection programmes do not cover all those vulnerable in crises; that richer households are better able to cope with shocks than poorer households; that the longer coping strategies are used, the more likely that they will have long-term negative effects; that use of coping strategies can result in distress; and that each crisis/shock erodes capacity to cope with other shocks.

A good understanding of people's coping strategies was recognised to be important for informed policymaking. Policies were suggested, including: well-designed, generous social protection programmes so that people do not need to use harmful coping mechanisms; programmes that encourage self-preparation; taking preventative rather than reactive actions; focusing on maintaining access to nutritious food for children and to health services for poor and vulnerable households; providing free schooling and the provision of school meals and uniforms to help parents keep children in school; support for credit and debt refinancing; measures to strengthen community cohesion; and systematic, proactive, and integrated risk management approaches (UNDP and UNICEF 2012; Mukherjee and Nayyar 2011; Heltberg *et al.* 2012a; Ötker-Robe and Podpiera 2013; Skoufias 2003).

The global fuel, food, and financial crises and the ways in which people coped with them eroded progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (UNDP and UNICEF 2012; Ötker-Robe and Podpiera 2013). That similar issues still exist with the current global crises suggests that policy lessons around people's coping strategies and their longer-term impacts have not adequately been learned or taken on board, and progress towards the SDGs is similarly at risk.



4.3.1 The impacts of economic crises and natural disasters during the 1990s and early 2000s

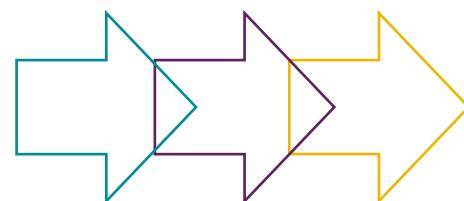
Skoufias (2003), reporting on the findings of a conference looking at the household coping strategies and the impact of crises on various dimensions of wellbeing and policies for protecting households, found that simultaneous shocks mean that many informal coping mechanisms, especially those that are community-based, can become less effective. The conference papers point out that programmes targeting the structurally poor do not necessarily reach those who are vulnerable to falling below the poverty line when crises strike (*ibid.*). This results in households using coping mechanisms that are not effective at protecting households and are costly to current and future welfare (*ibid.*).

Skoufias notes that ‘knowledge and better understanding of the main coping strategies of households is very useful for setting the priorities for public programs and safety nets’ (*ibid.*: 1099). The consequences of shocks and the inadequacy of individual coping strategies for future generations means that ‘public actions that prevent deteriorations in the nutritional status of children and maintain access to health services for poor and vulnerable households deserve top priority’ (*ibid.*: 1099). The conference papers also suggest that risk reduction policies prior to crises are more effective compared to mitigation and coping strategies after the crisis occurs.

4.3.2 The impacts for human development of the financial, food, and fuel crises of 2008–11

The shocks that resulted from the financial, food and fuel crises in 2008/9, eroded progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (Kirkpatrick 2012). As a result, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) looked at the evidence on how households coped during complex crises and the harmful impacts of aggregate shocks on human development (UNDP and UNICEF 2012; Mukherjee and Nayyar 2011). Looking specifically at the evidence from surveys in the Philippines and Kenya, they found income-related, food-related, and health and education-related coping strategies: people borrowed money, used savings, sold or pawned assets, changed their diet, reduced educational and health spending, and looked for additional work (UNDP and UNICEF 2012; Mukherjee and Nayyar 2011). They also noticed a difference within these strategies for poorer and richer households (e.g. poorer sold assets, richer pawned assets; poorer more likely to borrow from community, richer from private sources; poorer more likely to reduce food and education spending) (UNDP and UNICEF 2012; Mukherjee and Nayyar 2011). Richer households had more savings they could use and were more

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easily able to borrow to tide over shocks, while poorer households were more likely to engage in potentially harmful coping behaviour which is likely to result in adverse human development outcomes as they have less options available (UNDP and UNICEF 2012; Mukherjee and Nayyar 2011). The UNDP and UNICEF study noted that the ‘longer such coping measures last, the more likely that there will be long-term negative effects’ (2012: 15).

UNDP and UNICEF note that understanding how people cope is of interest to policymakers ‘as they link the better observed, macro indicators of a crisis, such as declines in GDP growth, increases in unemployment and falls in export revenues, to longer term negative impacts, such as extended periods of poverty, poorer health, stunted children and decreases in educational outcomes’ (2012: 8). This understanding could help in ‘devising policy interventions that could forestall negative long-term outcomes’ by putting in place well designed social protection that eliminates recourse to harmful coping strategies (UNDP and UNICEF 2012: 8; Mukherjee and Nayyar 2011; Mukherjee 2011).

Another group of studies, *Living through Crises*, also looked at how poor and vulnerable people responded to and struggled to cope with the global, contagious, and multifaceted food, fuel and financial crises of 2008–11, using rapid qualitative crisis monitoring data (Heltberg *et al.* 2012b). Qualitative crisis monitoring was felt to hold the ‘promise of providing, almost in real time, policy-relevant insights into how people were affected and what they did to cope with shocks’ (*ibid.*: 23).

They found that the coping strategies used across 17 countries between 2008–11 tended to involve: ‘attempting to increase income via family members seeking new or additional work; using savings or credit; selling assets; and reducing expenditure, for example, by changing the quantity and quality of diet, health care and education’ (*ibid.*: 28). These coping strategies showed both evidence of vulnerabilities and of resilience (see Table 5). In almost all study sites, ‘parents sought to shield children from the worst impacts of the crisis, foregoing meals so that children could eat and keeping them in school if at all possible’, in which they were especially helped by free schooling and the provision of school meals and uniforms (*ibid.*: 31).

Surviving extracts a heavy toll on poorer people and communities, with researchers observing ‘serious personal stress and anxiety over the daily struggles to make ends meet, family and community solidarity at breaking point, and breadwinners working unusually long hours or getting involved in precarious activities to afford a basic food basket’ (*ibid.*: 30).

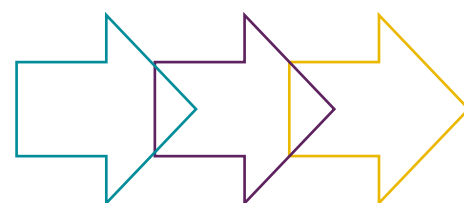


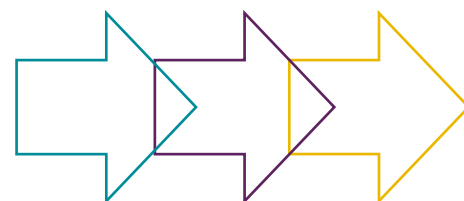
Table 5: Mix of resilience and vulnerabilities in coping strategies

Evidence of resilience	Evidence of vulnerability
Living off savings	Cutting back basic consumption; fewer and less nutritious meals
Internal migration for opportunities	Cutting back on essential non-food consumption including soap and shampoo
Adapting business strategies	Forgoing health care; switching to traditional healers
Cutting back on non-essential spending; delaying large purchases	Sale of assets needed for livelihood
Extending working hours	Accumulation of unserviceable debts
Working more jobs	School dropouts; child labour; switching from private to public schools
Striving to keep kids in school	High-risk income-generating activities
Returning to education or training	Depletion or breakdown of community support mechanisms
Communal meals	Theft, crime, drug selling
Mutual support groups; support from family and friends	Divorce and abandonment
Savings-credit groups	Increased alcohol and drug use
	Lower resilience to other shocks

Source: Heltberg *et al.* (2012b: 25). Copyright © International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / International Development Association or the World Bank; reproduced under **non-commercial re-use terms**.

The research found that ‘the poor often experienced multiple and repeated shocks from various sources (for example, climate, political violence, financial woes), and each shock eroded the capacity to cope with other shocks’ (*ibid.*: 30). People relied on informal coping mechanisms, often involving family and friends, as formal safety nets were lacking, but the ‘protracted nature of the crisis in some countries, however, led to gradual erosion of the social cohesion underpinning these informal safety nets’ (*ibid.*: 30).

The resilience shown by households during these crises has ‘economic and social costs that are paid today and, in the future’, with ‘possibly irreversible consequences in the form of stunted development of children, loss of health and of social and economic assets, and occasional loss of life when someone could not afford timely healthcare or became destitute’ (*ibid.*: 30–31). ‘Marginalised and poor people with weak social capital experienced the



most severe and irreversible hardships' and women were especially affected (*ibid.*: 31). Informal safety nets left outsiders, such as migrants and members of socially excluded groups, unprotected, while, as the food, fuel, and financial shocks were covariate (common across many people), it meant better-off groups were less able to provide customary levels of charitable assistance to poorer people in need (*ibid.*: 32). As a result, there is a need for 'more effective and more generous social protection systems; support packages for informal enterprises and smallholder farmers, including access to credit and debt refinancing schemes; as well as measures to strengthen community cohesion' (Heltberg *et al.* 2012a: 69).

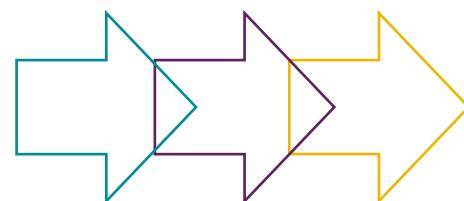
Ötker-Robe and Podpiera (2013) also looked at the global financial crisis and found that it made both public and private coping strategies challenging and resulted in significant deterioration of the economic and social indicators. With reduced social support from the government, individuals may adopt costly coping strategies that can have 'long-term consequences for individuals and make it difficult to escape poverty traps' (*ibid.*: 5). This is important as 'Education and nutrition during early childhood provide a window of opportunity to shape a generation's future health, human capital, productivity, and earning potential, and enhance the ability to cope in crisis times' (*ibid.*: 5), yet they are detrimentally affected as a result of people's coping strategies. Progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals for poverty reduction slowed across the board, and progress on other goals such as undernourishment and primary education particularly slowed in the most crisis-hit countries (*ibid.*).

Ötker-Robe and Podpiera suggest that this means there is a 'need for systematic, proactive, and integrated risk management by individuals, societies, and governments to prepare for adverse potential consequences of financial [or other] shocks', to prevent the slow down or reversal in progress towards development goals (*ibid.*: 29). Government responses to crises need to consider unintended economic and social consequences of their policies (e.g. austerity programmes without adequate social safety nets for vulnerable groups) and there is a need for well-designed social protection policies targeted at the most vulnerable, including those that encourage self-preparation (*ibid.*).

4.4. The Covid-19 pandemic, coping strategies, and meeting the SDGs

The UN (2023) noted that recovery from the pandemic across the world had been slow, uneven, and incomplete, which puts the promise of leaving no one behind in the SDGs in peril. Along with the war in Ukraine, and climate-related disasters, the pandemic effects have exacerbated faltering

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progress towards the SDGs globally, including in relation to poverty, food security, education, and gender equality (*ibid.*).

The CLEAR research findings on coping strategies and their longer-term impacts during the recent multiple shocks of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis indicate that progress towards several SDGs in Bangladesh has become more challenging, an experience that is mirrored much more widely across the world. The rest of this section looks at the affected goals in more detail.

Progress towards **SDG 1: No poverty** is challenging as the inadequacy of people's coping strategies in the face of the multiple crises of the pandemic and afterwards, and the inadequacy of official support, have left people stuck in poverty. While some have managed to escape their fall into poverty during the pandemic, many have lost their productive assets and been left with debt burdens which make it hard for them to escape the poverty trap because of the borrowing they took on to survive the pandemic. The lack of social protection for much of the vulnerable population who fell into poverty is a further challenge to meeting this goal in the face of future crises.

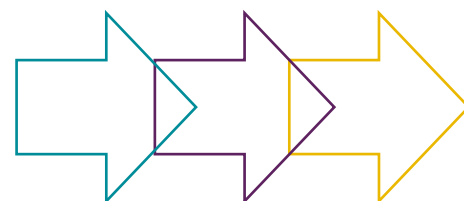
As changes to food consumption were a key coping strategy, during and after the pandemic, for dealing with the crises people faced, both in terms of reducing quantity and quality, progress towards **SDG 2: Zero hunger**, has been affected as people went hungry and became malnourished. This is especially problematic for children's long-term development. Despite some efforts to improve access to food for people in need by the Bangladeshi government during the pandemic, it was not enough to prevent food insecurity rising.

People's decision to reduce and delay spending on health care as a coping strategy makes progress towards **SDG 3: Good health and well-being** more challenging. Lack of timely care can worsen people's health conditions.

Another area in which people chose to reduce consumption as part of their coping strategies was in relation to education and, as a result, some children ended up dropping out of school, possibly permanently, which challenges progress towards **SDG 4: Quality education**. The effects on children's education can contribute to intergenerational poverty.

Progress towards **SDG 5: Gender equality** was also affected as CLEAR research found that boys were more likely to drop out of school as part of families' coping strategies, and women were often still restricted from working outside the home by their husbands or fathers, despite their family's needs, as a result of patriarchal social norms.

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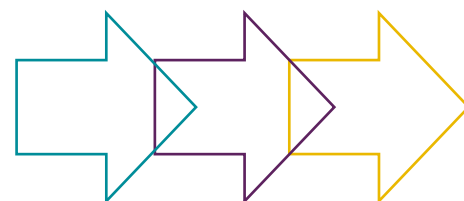
People sought alternative livelihood opportunities during the pandemic in order to cope but, in a blow to **SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth**, they often found themselves in work with lower wages or fewer hours and more precarious working conditions, or unable to find work, making it harder for them to provide for themselves and escape poverty.

The poorest were hit hardest by the pandemic and had fewer resources to cope with the pandemic's impacts, pushing some further into poverty. Marginalised groups faced greater difficulties accessing social protection as they lacked the connections to the relevant people, which pushed them further into poverty. Such impacts pose challenges to Bangladesh's progress towards **SDG 10: Reduced inequalities**.

Progress towards **SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities** was impacted as people living in urban low-income areas were hit hardest by the effects of the pandemic in Bangladesh and food and nutrition spending was lower as people tried to cope. Recovery has been slower in urban low-income areas. People living in these areas also experience stigma and discrimination, which made it harder to find work.

The issues people experienced trying to access social protection have had an effect on **SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions**, as people still had negative attitudes (lack of trust and low expectations) towards their local government representatives a few years later as a result.

The Bangladeshi government has integrated the SDGs into its Eighth Five-Year Plan (2021–25) (GoB 2023). Looking at the work relevant to the affected goals detailed above, it aims to: enhance social protection, including its nutrition-sensitive and shock-responsive elements; expand universal health care; address job creation; achieve universal literacy and primary education; enhance women's economic empowerment; increase resilience to crisis and shocks; and reduce poverty and inequality (*ibid.*). Such efforts by the government towards achieving the SDGs in Bangladesh need to take into account the effects of the crises Bangladeshis have faced during and after the pandemic and the effects of their depleting coping strategies, in order to be successful.



5. Knowledge agenda for Bangladesh

The CLEAR research projects brought out evidence about multiple crises, coping strategies, and their long-term impacts, which deepens and broadens knowledge in both Bangladesh and further afield about the experiences of vulnerable populations. The lack of much change from the similar issues in relation to coping strategies and their impacts on human development that arose during the last major global crisis (2008–11) suggests that more progress is needed on disseminating such knowledge, and developing more knowledge, to better understand how to prevent similar detrimental consequences arising from future crises. In light of the upcoming **‘Summit of the Future’** in September 2024, which is looking beyond the SDGs and 2030 and is seen as an opportunity to set the world on a better path, further knowledge of the ways in which people’s coping strategies in crises affects developmental progress could be beneficial. Looking forward for Bangladesh, as its current Five-Year Plan is ending next year (2021–25), this is also an opportunity to use knowledge gained and future research to support the articulation of the next Five-Year Plan, running up to the end of the SDG period.

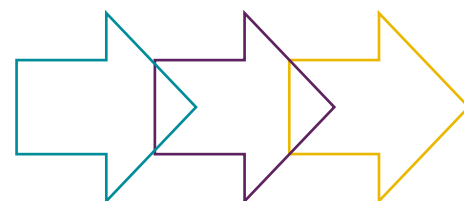
Some knowledge areas suggested by the CLEAR research for further exploration include:

5.1. Depletion of coping strategies, long-term impacts, and future crises

The CLEAR research showed how people’s coping strategies were being depleted by the multiple shocks during and after the pandemic. What this means for poor and vulnerable people in Bangladesh (and elsewhere), practically and emotionally over the short and long term, and their ability to cope with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and possible future crises, needs to be explored in greater detail to prevent further setbacks in progress towards poverty reduction and human development. More longitudinal research is needed to examine how these initial coping mechanisms shape longer-term multidimensional poverty.

5.2. Networks for recovery

The role of networks helping people cope during crises and in recovery was illustrated in the CLEAR research. Nazneen *et al.* note that ‘there is not



much in the literature that highlights the usefulness of networks in the context of collective shocks that occurred during the polycrisis of Covid, economic downturns, and climate change' (2024: 23). More knowledge is needed to better understand how marginalised people who are left out of these networks cope; how these networks can continue to provide support when everyone is affected; how multiple crises/shocks affect the ability of these networks to provide support as time goes on; the consequences of people not being able to reciprocate within their networks over time on the strength of their connection to that network; and the consequences that reliance on such networks may have, rather than regularised formal support, for instance.

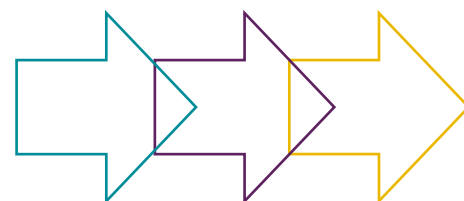
5.3. The emotional impacts of coping and poverty stigma

The distress caused by trying to survive, of being in poverty, and dealing with the consequences of the coping strategies used, came out in the CLEAR research. Further knowledge on what impact this has on people in Bangladesh (and elsewhere) and their ability to escape poverty is needed, as well as better understanding of measures that can be taken in the Bangladeshi context to support people to recover from these emotional impacts in a context where poverty and the need for assistance are stigmatised. Reducing the shame, stigma and discrimination around poverty and residents of low-income neighbourhoods is needed to facilitate moving out of poverty (Roelen *et al.* 2023, 2024; Nazneen *et al.* 2024). The social norms which result in these attitudes were found to have a strong affect on households which were not recovering in Bangladesh, so it is important to explore the roles these social norms play in people's coping strategies and recovery (Nazneen *et al.* 2024).

5.4. Urban poverty, not just rural poverty

Urban poverty emerged as a serious concern in Bangladesh, despite policy typically associating poverty with rural areas (Rahman *et al.* 2022; Roelen *et al.* 2024; Nazneen *et al.* 2024). CLEAR research shows the impact of the pandemic on urban poverty and the slower recovery in urban low-income areas. Understanding what works in urban low-income areas to alleviate poverty and protect people from crises is needed.

Social protection programming that works in rural areas might not be the right response for the urban poor in Bangladesh (Rahman *et al.* 2022). Rahman *et al.* note that there needs to be a 'scaled-up and fit-for-purpose urban social protection programme portfolio to address both the new poor and the old poor' (2022: 16). They suggest that the challenge is a 'twofold



one: a shift in policy mindset towards acceptance of the urban poor as a priority focus for social protection and innovations in programming that can address the specific needs of the urban poor' (*ibid.*: 16). More knowledge about how this can come about is needed.

5.5. Shock responsive, including vulnerable people and new poor too, not just ultra poor

The pandemic research shows the importance of focusing on vulnerable people and the new poor, i.e. not just those already in poverty, as they are at risk of falling into poverty when crises strike. Currently policy in Bangladesh targets those who are chronically poor rather than transiently poor or vulnerable non-poor (Nazneen *et al.* 2024). Social protection schemes in Bangladesh are targeted at ultra-poor households and missed the vulnerable non-poor groups who were impacted worse during the pandemic (*ibid.*). More knowledge is needed about how to include such groups in Bangladesh's and other countries' social protection systems, especially when shocks occur, or even beforehand, and how such inclusion may better help them to cope with crises. Research should examine exclusion and the intersecting political, geographic, gender, and poverty dimensions of vulnerable and poor people to inform more inclusive social assistance.

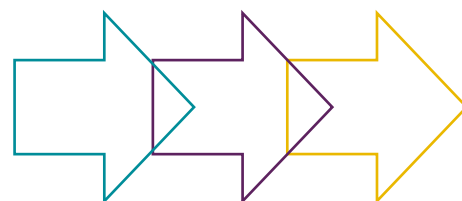
5.6. Trajectories of poverty and recovery

The CLEAR research showed people moving in and out of poverty over the course of the pandemic crisis. Further understanding of who became poor, who was able to escape poverty, the different kinds of coping strategies used, and how they can be supported by formal programmes would be useful, given that many lacked access to social protection. Part of people's struggles to cope involved the expenditure burdens they faced, and more knowledge about the role of macroeconomic policy around the costs of health care, education, transportation, and utilities could be beneficial (Rahman *et al.* 2022).

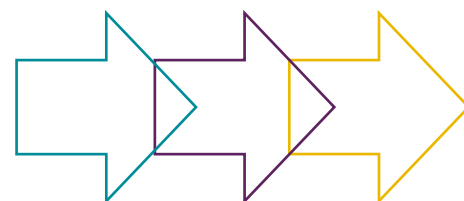
5.7. Longitudinal research

The qualitative and quantitative longitudinal approach taken by the CLEAR research projects to explore the impact of the pandemic made it possible to see changes over time in people's coping strategies in the face of multiple shocks, both materially and emotionally. This made it possible to see how coping strategies depleted over time and gave some understanding of the consequences of these coping strategies on people's human development.

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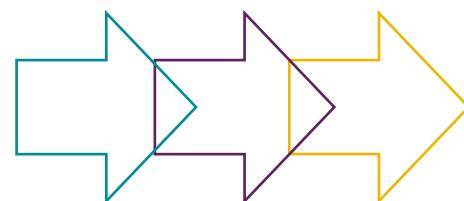
Further such longitudinal research can give a better understanding of the long-term consequences of the coping strategies used. Using such methods both during and after crises helps with knowledge of how crises progress and the impact of multiple shocks, which can inform policies and practices that can respond better to future crises.



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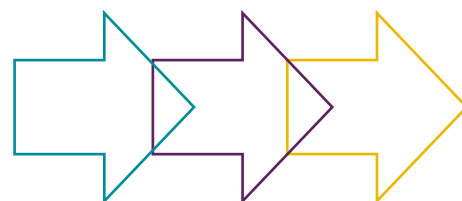
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