



A boy passes in front of a Covid-19 information mural in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya, the largest slum in Africa.

PHOTO: © SIMON TOWNSLEY/
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Stories of Change: Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE)



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Clerks check documentation of applicants for financial assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic in Bangkok, Thailand.
PHOTO: PATRICK BROWN/PANOS PICTURES



Introduction

Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) was a three-year, CA\$25m rapid research initiative that brought together 20 research projects to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery.

The research, funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), took place across 42 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) supported CORE to maximise the learning generated across the research portfolio and deepen engagement with governments, civil society, and the scientific community.

This publication celebrates the impact of that research, and highlights Stories of Change from seven of the CORE projects that successfully influenced policy, practice, and understandings of the crisis. Collectively, these individual case studies provide a narrative about the nature of research impact in emergencies and the implications for the design and delivery of future rapid response research initiatives.

There are clear lessons around the importance of organisational reputation, and the value of co-designing research with decision makers whilst simultaneously taking a critical position. Every story here emphasises the need to understand political context and to explore the trade-offs between research rigour and the timeliness of evidence. Above all, they illustrate the value of flexible funding arrangements that enable local teams to respond to fast-moving crises.

These stories demonstrate unequivocally the value of locally led research responses to emergencies with the right international flow of resources and support. CORE's research teams were well-placed to bring together communities, civil society organisations, and governments to create a space for vulnerable and marginalised groups to discuss their lived experiences of the pandemic and bring these perspectives into policy conversations. Their success hinged on their hyper-local knowledge and their unwavering focus on providing real-time evidence to advocate for the wellbeing of affected communities.

James Georgalakis

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Key resources from the CORE programme

Ordóñez Llanos, A. and Georgalakis, J. (eds) (2023) '[Knowledge in Times of Crisis: Transforming Research-to-Policy Approaches](#)', *IDS Bulletin* 54.2, DOI: [10.19088/1968-2023.126](#) (accessed 25 October 2023)

Clark, L.; Carpenter, J. and Taylor, J. (2023) '[Insights for Influence: Understanding Impact Pathways in Crisis Response](#)', Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: [10.19088/CORE.2023.016](#) (accessed 27 November 2023)

CORE themes

CORE research focused on the most affected populations and regions while seeking to advance gender equality and address the ways the Covid-19 pandemic has deepened existing vulnerabilities. The primary themes are:



Macroeconomic policies for support and recovery



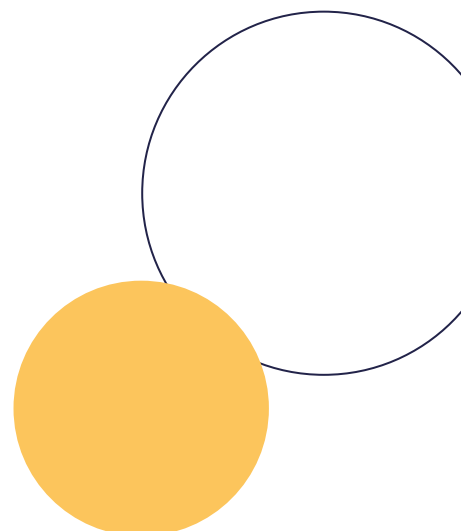
Supporting essential economic activity – protecting informal businesses, small producers, and women workers



Promoting democratic governance – accountability, social inclusion, and civil engagement

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① Improving the fiscal policy response to Covid-19 in Pakistan

The Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions have had profound socioeconomic impacts worldwide. Governments have been faced with responding urgently to mitigate such effects, especially for the most vulnerable. Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) partner Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP) – a Southern-led organisation which believes that evidence produced from an in-country perspective, by empowered and engaged local researchers and policymakers, results in better policy choices – has been working closely with policymakers in Pakistan to assess the Covid-19 impacts and the effectiveness of current and potential policies. As a result, PEP has helped introduce tax reforms for the hardest hit, agricultural subsidies for farmers, and the reduction of trade tariffs for struggling businesses.



Muhammad Yusuf sells spices at the Empress Market, a colonial era market that is one of the busiest and most popular for shopping in Karachi.
Photo: IMF Photo/Saiyna Bashir, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

The challenge

As rapid-response policies are implemented to mitigate the immediate health, economic, and social effects of Covid-19, developing country populations – and especially those most vulnerable – are at risk of being left behind. In Pakistan, at the start of the pandemic, public service delivery came under severe pressure. The lockdowns halted economic growth and put employment at risk. Due to the delayed medical solutions and vaccination, the second and third waves of Covid-19 further exacerbated these challenges. Amid low economic growth, and resultant decline in collections from taxes, there was a concern regarding sustainability of social protection offered by the government.

The research

As part of the CORE Simulations and Field Experiments of Policy Responses and Interventions to Promote Inclusive Adaptation to and Recovery from the Covid-19 Crisis project, PEP has been supporting 11 projects in Africa, Asia, and South America since July 2020 to inform inclusive adaptation and recovery policies responding to the Covid-19 crisis.

In Pakistan, the research team is leading a study to explain the macroeconomic and welfare impacts of changes in indirect taxes brought about as a response to the pandemic. The team is using a simulation approach, known as the PEP Single Country Recursive Dynamic Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) model, to guide decision makers to explore the likely impacts that certain policy responses may have had during the first wave of the pandemic. These policy responses are tax relief for commodity producing sectors, and production subsidies in the agriculture sector. The team is studying the effects of the pandemic on women and vulnerable

/// The PEP project was instrumental in (a) providing a rapid forecast of how reducing economic activities during lockdowns would impact direct and indirect tax collections, and (b) what this would mean for the government's spending envelope for the next fiscal budget. ///

Deputy Chief of
Public Investment
Authorisation
Section of Ministry
of Planning

groups and analysing how policy responses may have influenced various forms of inequalities. Another area is the sustainability of tax relief and subsidies as the pandemic continues.

The study finds that fiscal policy changes designed for the manufacturing sector offer the highest gains in real gross domestic product and reduction in consumer prices; tax relief offered for the services sector firms leads to the highest investment gains; all fiscal responses lead to increases in exports and an even higher increase in import demand; consumption inequalities may have expanded as a result of the pandemic and fiscal policy responses, and that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the widening of gender inequalities.

The impact

Throughout the project, the team has engaged with policymakers at the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce, National Tariff Commission, Federal Board of Revenue, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, and the Prime Minister's Office. Working closely with these stakeholders, as well as having a representative from the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives as a government member of the research team, has been pivotal to the project successfully informing policy in a timely manner.

Since the start of the pandemic, the government has encouraged PEP to participate in its working groups to monitor Covid-19 impacts. The team has also been contributing to government-led public private dialogues where PEP's research has been **regularly cited and discussed**.

The initial simulations findings informed the formulation of the federal budget for the fiscal year 2021/22, a process led by the Ministries of Finance and Planning. First, the Federal Board of Revenue revisited the design of indirect taxes to ensure tax relief benefits the most in need. Second, a targeted subsidies programme for agriculture was introduced and a Farmer Support Card was launched. Third, trade taxes and tariffs at the import stage were rationalised by the National Tariff Commission. Tariffs on inputs and intermediate goods were further reduced to enhance industrial competitiveness. The Federal Board of Revenue rationalised the general sales tax on large-scale manufacturing, priority agriculture and food items, and selected sub-sectors.

The research team has worked closely with the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics to highlight the need for gendered national income accounts data. As a result, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics has **publicly acknowledged** the need for such data and will now embark on producing gendered data on relevant indicators so that in future a gendered CGE model can be utilised which in turn will also allow a more comprehensive analysis of various forms of horizontal inequalities.

The team recently organised a **national policy conference** in which representatives from the Prime Minister's Office shared plans to convene a special meeting to discuss the team's findings with the Prime Minister and the parliamentary committee on finance and economic governance.

The project has demonstrated how useful an up-to-date macro model can be in helping policymakers determine the best policies to use in critical times. The findings will also be useful in future crises.

Further reading

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Nazir, A. et al. (2021) *Developing Inclusive and Creative Economies: Creative and Social Enterprise in Pakistan*, Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute (accessed 1 June 2022)

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② Building safer and more sustainable food systems in Peru

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



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

The challenge

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

The research

As part of the '[Building back better: Using a disruptive crisis to achieve sustainable and gender inclusive improvements in food security, labour markets and social protection](#)' project, GRADE has been researching what cost-effective policy options – and unforeseen opportunities – exist for Peru and other Latin-American countries. In terms of food security in Lima, the team has been researching the difficulties that the most vulnerable urban households have been facing to access food (fresh products in particular) during the pandemic. Based on research studies and initial pilots, the team has been working with

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

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

national and local actors to design evidence-based interventions that can help these households improve their food security, and local food vendors economically recover from the crisis – while ensuring that the spread of Covid-19 is minimised in these markets.

The impact

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

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

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

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

Further reading

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

Authors

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3 Strengthening food security in Pakistan during the Covid-19 pandemic

Pakistan is facing numerous socio-economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, including on food security. Food insecurity, which is a long-standing issue, has become more visible since the pandemic. Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) partner the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) – a leading policy research thinktank – has been supporting the Government of Pakistan to maintain essential economic activity and protect workers and small producers during the pandemic. One notable contribution has been the development of a Food Security Portal, which is being used by the government to better manage food security in the country. It is the first track and trace system from farm to fork for essential food items.



Muhammad Tariq sells vegetables at the Empress Market, a colonial era market that is one of the busiest and most popular for shopping in Karachi. Photo: IMF Photo/Saiyna Bashir, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The challenge

The Covid-19 pandemic has severely affected the Pakistani economy. Declining incomes, disruptions to the informal economy, and the depleting state of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), caused by lockdown measures, have directly impacted on people's food security and livelihoods. Food insecurity, which was already posing significant challenges for decision makers before the pandemic, has been exacerbated since. The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in the food system – both on the supply and demand side, as well as key gaps in policies, institutional capacities, and response strategies. Decision makers lacked the necessary data on the food system to respond strategically. Covid-19 has provided an opportunity to develop new policies to ensure food security and economic recovery, and which are inclusive and aligned with the agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The research

SDPI is leading the Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) project on Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises, Food Security, and Evolving Social Protection Mechanisms to Deal with Covid-19 in Pakistan. As part of this project, the team has been documenting evidence on the impact of the pandemic, informing response strategies during relief and recovery phases, and strengthening local research. The project focuses on addressing the limitations of the social protection regime in Pakistan, and mapping formal and informal SMEs to generate evidence on the effectiveness of a stimulus package for SMEs. The research team has developed a Food Security Portal – a data visualisation tool designed to support the government to better monitor the supply and demand of essential food commodities and resulting changes in prices at district, provincial, and national levels.

“In the past, most decisions in the food and agriculture sector were based on assumptions or limited data, while now, thanks to timely data, the Food Security Portal has changed the way decisions are made in the sector to improve the lives of people in Pakistan.”

Guffran Memon,
Federal Secretary,
Ministry of National
Food Security and
Research

The impact

The Food Security Portal, which makes real-time data available to all levels of government, has become an essential evidence-based tool for decision makers to improve food availability and accessibility, and to ensure affordable food prices in the country. For example, early import and release of wheat by the Government of Punjab this year will help tackle wheat inflation.

Successful uptake of the portal can be attributed to several key factors. First, it was designed to respond to a clear need identified around the lack of information available to decision makers on the food system in the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Second, it is the product of a close collaboration between the research team and government departments. Together, they set the objective of developing a tool to provide timely data to inform food security policies at the national and sub-national levels in times of crisis. Political will at the highest level enabled the portal to be institutionalised.

The SDPI team first introduced the idea of a portal to cabinet members, who approved the initiative in September 2020. This was followed by discussions with the Food Security Advisory Council, whose members mandated SDPI to materialise it shortly after. As a result, a technical working group led by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) was created. In March 2021, SDPI provided technical assistance to the ministry to prepare a draft legal instrument for the cabinet to introduce it as the *Pakistan Food Security Flow and Information Ordinance 2021*. This ordinance was then promulgated in September 2021.

The ordinance empowers the government to fix prices and seek information about the supply and demand of commodities through a new National Food Security and Management Committee (NFSMC). The NFSMC, headed by the prime minister, is tasked with formulating the country's first National Food Security Policy and forming a National Executive Committee to implement it.

Meanwhile, cabinet members, who were kept up to date with the progress made, handed over the Food Security Portal maintenance and management to the MNFSR in June 2021. Since then, the SDPI team has been building the capacity of MNFSR staff to run the portal, and closely monitoring its progress. The portal is widely used by the ministry and other departments at various levels, who are responsible for providing data regularly. It generates daily, weekly, and monthly reports which are shared with key stakeholders. It is now expanding its scope to include projections, comparative analysis, and analysis over time.

This initiative has demonstrated how essential real-time data is for evidence-based decision-making. It was key for the research team to work closely with government actors from the outset to understand their needs and develop a useful, innovative tool enabling them to bring about positive change and improve people's food security.

Further reading

Thompson, J. *et al.* (2021) *The Impact of Covid-19 on Livelihoods and Food Security*, Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Research for Policy and Practice Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: [10.19088/CORE.2021.001](https://doi.org/10.19088/CORE.2021.001)

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④ Collective action to support family farming in Colombia

The Covid-19 pandemic has hit small-scale farmers, particularly women, very hard in Latin America. RIMISP – Latin American Center for Rural Development – has been conducting participatory research to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on smallholder farmers in the department of Huila, in Colombia. The team has been working closely with the Secretariat of Agriculture and Mining of the Government of Huila to set up a Rural Dialogue Group to promote discussion on the project's findings with local stakeholders. These discussions are helping to shape the local government's agenda around these issues. The research team is also strengthening the capacity of small producer organisations to better access public programmes.



Woman producer in Huila, Colombia. Photo: RIMISP

The challenge

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of agri-food systems to shocks and stresses, which has led to increased global food insecurity and malnutrition. Small-scale farmers and women producers have been particularly affected by challenges across agri-food systems. The [project survey](#) finds that female-headed households have a higher incidence of food insecurity. The burden of household and productive work has increased for women producers more than for men producers due to care responsibilities during the pandemic.

In Huila, Colombia, [53 per cent of agricultural production units](#) belong to family farmers and other smallholders in the community, and [43 per cent of its population](#) has been affected by food insecurity since the beginning of the pandemic. Small farmers' capacity needs in the department of Huila include access to public programmes and projects, marketing channels and other opportunities to be productive.

The research

RIMISP is leading the [Sowing Development: Small Scale Agriculture and Food Security Resilient to Covid-19](#) project in Colombia and other Latin American countries. In Huila, the team conducted participatory research on the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic in the agri-food system. Researchers led focus group discussions with family farming producers, interviews with women producers and other relevant stakeholders, and a food and nutrition security survey. The aim is to better understand how to promote more sustainable, gender-sensitive, and inclusive agri-food systems that are more resilient to shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research findings include the need to strengthen the capacity of the existing network of small-scale producers' organisations in Huila. This involves expanding the services it provides to its members – beyond political demands – to include support around production and marketing. This is intended to help producers increase their production and income, and to better access relevant programmes and policies.

“The rural dialogue groups are a fundamental space to think about the rural development model of the department, which cannot only be formulated from Bogotá.”

Secretary of Agriculture of the department of Huila

The impact

RIMISP set up a Rural Dialogue Group in Huila for key stakeholders to discuss the project's research findings and make evidence-based decisions to improve local-level policies aimed at supporting smallholder farmers. The takeaways were synthesised into a [policy brief](#) for the Secretary of Agriculture and other actors represented in the group. The Rural Dialogue Group is now discussing each recommendation in greater depth. The aim is to feed these into the rural development model being developed by the Governor's Office of Huila, and in the next development plan.

Based on both the research findings and the Rural Dialogue Group discussions, RIMISP decided to strengthen 15 producer organisations in the north of the department, using a diagnosis and a capacity-strengthening plan. The RIMISP team worked with the organisations to review the departmental government programmes which they have access to. They then included activities to help the organisations comply with the requirements of the programmes within the plans.

Among the planned activities, RIMISP is now supporting the organisations to apply for and meet the requirements of the local public procurement programme. The policy, which has been difficult to implement, requires that 70 per cent of food purchases by public entities be made from small agricultural producers or their organisations. Thanks to this activity and engagement with the local media, this issue is now on the department's agenda. The team plans to share these lessons at the national level when the public procurement policy is discussed in the National Technical Committee for local public procurement.

RIMISP has also been carrying out a diagnosis of women's participation within these organisations to formulate recommendations to support women. The capacity-strengthening plans therefore also include activities aimed at closing the gender gap at the decision-making levels. The capacity-strengthening process has generated methodological and conceptual learnings. The RIMISP team has shared the methodology with others who may want to adapt and replicate it – including Plataforma Sur, the institution that works most closely with organisations in Huila.

The team's close collaboration with the Secretariat of Agriculture and Mining of the Governor's Office of Huila – the principal decision maker for agricultural policy in the department – was essential in convening the Rural Dialogue Group and securing the participation of other high-level stakeholders. These include other department and municipal government actors; directors leading the main programmes aimed at small farmers; leaders from the academic sector; representatives of SENA – the national training service who train farmers, and farming and development organisations working in Huila.

The project has highlighted the importance of spaces for dialogue for key stakeholders to get together and come up with evidence-based collective strategies to address specific issues such as family farming. It has led to more effective local planning processes and collective strategies in Huila around the issue. Thanks to the process of organisational strengthening, farmer organisations are now better able to access public programmes, access credit and even establish a farmers market.

Further reading

RIMISP (2022) [Policy Brief – Huila. Siembra Desarrollo: pequeña agricultura y alimentación resilientes al COVID-19](#), Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (accessed 16 November 2022)

Niño, D. (2022) [Estado y perspectivas de la seguridad alimentaria y la agricultura familiar tras la pandemia en Colombia](#), Análisis de Coyuntura Siembra Desarrollo, Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (accessed 16 November 2022)

Cano, A.; Albacete, M. and Quesada, C. (2021) [Inseguridad alimentaria en tiempos de covid-19: Evidencia de ocho territorios latinoamericanos](#), Análisis de Coyuntura Siembra Desarrollo, Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (accessed 16 November 2022)

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5 Fostering gender diversity and inclusiveness in street vendor associations in India

This project, led by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), focuses on the effects of the socioeconomic crisis created by the Covid-19 pandemic on informal women workers in India, particularly street vendors in the context of shrinking state support and gaps in access to social security. The study emphasises the importance of understanding the specific opportunities and challenges faced by those engaged in informal work, especially women, so that policies are informed by and respond to their specific needs. It also provides valuable insights into how prevalent gender norms interact with gaps in state support to disproportionately impact the conditions of informal women workers when compared to men. ICRW successfully engaged with grassroots organisations to advise them on how their programmes can be more inclusive and responsive to the differentiated needs of women street vendors.



A woman at a street market in India. Photo: [VPKyriacou](#)

The challenge

In India, there are an **estimated 11.9 million street vendors of which 1.2 million are women**. They are informal workers with low, irregular sources of income (daily wages), are often migrants who reside in informal urban settlements, have limited access to social security benefits, and often face harassment from municipal bodies and the police. Women also experience lower levels of education, limited access to sanitation facilities at work, heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence, and a greater burden of unpaid care work at home.

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, **India suffered the second highest number of cases in the world** and implemented stringent lockdown measures. Many women street vendors lost their primary source of income with little notice, and those who were the sole or chief wage earners in their families were severely impacted. Although the pandemic is no longer classified as a global health emergency, its lingering effects continue to negatively impact their lives and livelihoods.

The research

ICRW found that street vendors experienced a drastic loss in income and employment during the pandemic. This led to depleted savings, reduced food consumption, and heavy borrowing, often at high interest rates, to make ends meet. Many continue to face severe debt.

///ICRW's research has given us a new perspective on how gender is central to the issue of street vendors and has encouraged us to work in that direction.///

Sangeeta Singh, Head of the Street Food Program, National Association of Street Vendors in India (NASVI)

Their economic precarity was further exacerbated by their informal status. For example, limited possession of official documents, such as ration cards, meant that they could not access government subsidised food grains. Women faced additional challenges, such as difficulty accessing sexual and reproductive health services, as health services had been rerouted to deal with the pandemic. They also faced increased violence during their commute and at work, including verbal abuse and physical assault by police, which can be partly attributed to the mobility and transport restrictions imposed during lockdowns.

The impact

ICRW's research has helped grassroots organisations, who work directly with street vendors, become more sensitive and responsive towards the specific needs of women. In July 2022, ICRW convened six organisations and shared emerging findings about the specific challenges faced by women street vendors and how these negatively impact their livelihood opportunities compared to male street vendors. These challenges include fear of sexual harassment, lack of access to toilets and water at work, the burden of domestic care work, and intimate partner violence. The event was attended by representatives from the [National Association of Street Vendors in India \(NASVI\)](#) and highlighted the vital importance of having and collecting gender segregated data as part of NASVI's work. NASVI's Head of the Street Food Program, Sangeeta Singh, commented: *'ICRW's research has given us a new perspective on how gender is central to the issue of street vendors and has encouraged us to work in that direction'*.

NASVI, [which represents 528,645 members from 888 organisations across 25 Indian states](#), subsequently invited ICRW to conduct a workshop with approximately 50–60 of their programme staff to help them integrate a gender perspective in their work. By presenting findings from the research and undertaking a participatory experience-sharing exercise with the group, ICRW highlighted the criticality of bringing a gender and social inclusion lens to NASVI's frontline work.

It also emphasised the need for women street vendors to be able to articulate and assert themselves in front of male street vendors and government officials. To this end, ICRW recently conducted capacity building sessions for over 100 women street vendors who are members of the [Town Vending Committees \(TVC\)](#) in different states. The sessions built their confidence to attend TVC meetings more regularly and express their needs and concerns effectively, in the presence of male members of the committee.

Conclusion

The project successfully sensitised grassroots organisations in India, including representatives from NASVI, to the different realities of women street vendors, and enabled them to be responsive to their needs. For NASVI, this partnership with ICRW has highlighted the need for programming on the ground to be more responsive to these realities and intersectional needs.

Further reading

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Nanda, S.; Sengupta, N.; Anand, S.; Sharma, S. and Seth, K. (2021) [Covid-19 Policies and Women in Informal Work in India – A REBUILD Scoping Report](#), New Delhi: International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

Pillai, S. et al. (2022) [India's Policy Response to Covid-19 and the Gendered Impact on Urban Informal Workers in Delhi NCR : A Policy Landscaping by The Quantum Hub and ICRW \(Asia\)](#), New Delhi: The Quantum Hub – International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

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⑥ Waste pickers are part of the solution to solid waste management in Senegal

Waste pickers from the Bokk Diom organisation, working at Dakar's Mbeubeuss landfill – in Senegal's capital city – continued to provide essential waste management services throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, contributing to public health, reducing environmental harm, and mitigating greenhouse gases. As with many, their incomes were impacted by the pandemic, especially those of women. However, the greatest threat to their incomes and livelihoods is the transformation of the waste management system, a process which they are excluded from. Drawing on [research](#) carried out with Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) during the pandemic, Bokk Diom was able to advocate on behalf of waste pickers and obtain pledges of inclusion in solid waste management (SWM) from national authorities. Bokk Diom and WIEGO are continuing in their efforts to attain a just transition for waste pickers.



Bigué Cissé is a waste picker specialised in the recuperation of plastics. She is a member of the Association of Waste Pickers of Mbeubeuss, Bokk Diom, which successfully achieved greater recognition of workers' rights by establishing the first national union of waste pickers. She has been working at the Mbeubeuss landfill for over 15 years. Photo: © Marta Moreiras, commissioned by WIEGO.

The challenge

As part of its plan to develop a national SWM system under the project [Promotion of Integrated Waste Management and the Economy of Solid Waste \(PROMOGED\)](#), the Government of Senegal has set out to restructure the Mbeubeuss dumpsite on the outskirts of Dakar. With an area of 114 hectares, Mbeubeuss is one of the largest open-air dumpsites in the world. It receives about 80 per cent of all waste produced in Senegal and provides income for over 2,000 informal waste pickers who pick out, clean, and re-sell material dumped there, particularly plastic. PROMOGED is supported by major international backers, including the World Bank, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), the French Development Agency (AFD), and the European Investment Bank (EIB). It seeks to modernise the infrastructure on the site through a public-private partnership. But how will informal waste pickers be included into SWM, and how will their livelihoods be protected?

The research

As part of a wider study looking at the [impacts of the pandemic on specific groups of informal sector workers](#), WIEGO conducted a survey and in-depth interviews with members of Bokk Diom.

In addition to diminished earnings, the study found that waste pickers faced increased costs of working; for example, around buying their own personal protective equipment.

// I would like to reassure waste pickers working on the site... that their interests will be fully considered... by retraining them in the industry in compliance with hygiene, health, safety, and environmental standards. //

Macky Sall, President of Senegal. Comments made at the launching of PROMOGED, 24 June 2021

Unsurprisingly, they also experienced increased debts and depleted savings, whilst almost none received any type of relief from the government.

The greatest impact on waste pickers' livelihoods, however, was caused by increased access restrictions to recyclables under PROMOGED, which diverts them from the dumpsite before arriving to Mbeubeuss. Changes to waste collection schedules particularly affected women waste pickers as most of the materials arrived at the dumpsite in the middle of the night, increasing risks to their safety.

Despite these impacts on their work, waste pickers have been excluded from decision-making spaces and they have not received any guarantees to secure **their livelihoods**.

The impact

WIEGO's research helped waste pickers articulate the role they play as essential workers contributing to Senegal's **mitigation of greenhouse gases**. Waste pickers also requested relief measures to cope with their immediate needs during the pandemic, and raised demands for a just transition that guarantees their livelihoods and includes them in the SWM system.

Moreover, WIEGO helped Bokk Diom strengthen its partnership with the Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs du Sénégal (CNTS), which created openings for engagement with local and national authorities.

As a result, at PROMOGED's launch in June 2021, President Macky Sall himself explicitly **reassured waste pickers that their livelihoods would be protected and that they would be included in the SWM system**. A year later, the head of PROMOGED pledged that waste pickers' working conditions would be improved. Representatives from Bokk Diom were then invited to participate in the Mixed Committee to oversee the measures to restructure Mbeubeuss, alongside representatives from PROMOGED and the Solid Waste Management Coordination Unit (UCG).

The visibility obtained through the research has helped bolster WIEGO's organisational strengthening work with Bokk Diom. It also helped alliance-building efforts in favour of the **formation of a cooperative** (with the International Labour Organization, ILO), and to seek recognition of their labour rights by becoming the first national union of waste pickers (with CNTS). Both of these developments are crucial as Bokk Diom works to position itself as a SWM service provider.

Finally, following WIEGO's capacity-building work with women to diversify their income and strengthen their communication skills, they now have enhanced participation in Bokk Diom's decision-making and increased leadership in engagements with other stakeholders.

Conclusion

This project has highlighted the importance of building awareness and organisational capacity amongst marginalised and excluded communities so they can both represent themselves in the face of more powerful actors and link to wider national support structures. Thanks to the research and the process of organisational strengthening, Mbeubeuss' waste pickers had actionable data to advance their claims-making strategies and build alliances to gain visibility, but there is still a long way to go.

Further reading

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WIEGO (2022) *Covid-19 and Informal Work in 11 Cities: Recovery Pathways Amidst Continued Crisis*, WIEGO Working Paper 43, Manchester: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (accessed 16 August 2023)

WIEGO and Bokk Diom (2022) *La crise de la Covid-19 et l'économie informelle à Dakar, Sénégal : impacts durables et agenda de redressement* (accessed 16 August 2023)

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7 Strengthening social accountability for meaningful youth engagement in Africa

Following its research which highlighted the key role played by young people in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) developed and delivered a training of trainers on social accountability for meaningful youth engagement. The training was aimed at youth-led civil society organisations (CSOs) and local authorities in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. In Uganda, it led to the establishment of a coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) dedicated to social accountability; in Kenya, youth-led CSOs and local governments began to take a more inclusive approach to governance and policy development; and in Ethiopia, plans were made for a youth CSO thinktank focused on social accountability.



A trainee gives a presentation at the COYOQA Training of Trainers Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya. Photo: © OSSREA

The challenge

Young people across Africa played a significant role in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic; for example, through awareness-raising, community outreach, and social accountability and humanitarian projects. Although youth policies exist in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, in practice there has been very limited meaningful engagement of young people in the design, implementation, and evaluation of relevant programmes and policies.

Policies alone do not guarantee the practical involvement of young people in programme design and execution. Institutional barriers, bureaucratic hurdles, and resistance to change within government structures can also hinder youth participation. Additionally, there might be a lack of awareness and capacity among local authorities and stakeholders on how to effectively engage young people in decision-making processes – even where these have been specifically mandated to work with youth on social accountability.

Addressing the challenges that hinder meaningful youth engagement requires a multifaceted approach including capacity-building, resource allocation, and a cultural shift towards recognising and valuing youth perspectives and contributions in governance and policymaking.

The research

As part of its ongoing work in the region, OSSREA led a participatory action research project which analysed how young people were affected by the pandemic. The project examined how young people can be key actors who can be meaningfully engaged in response mitigation and evaluation efforts while also holding their governments to account. Consequently, the team designed a training of trainers programme aimed at both youth-led CSOs and local authorities, raising awareness of barriers to inclusion as well as enabling participants to build capacity within their respective organisations.

Ninety representatives received training across nine research sites: Nairobi, Mombasa, and Busia in Kenya; Kampala, Masaka, and Gulu in Uganda; and Addis Ababa, Hawassa, and Jigjiga in Ethiopia. The

During the workshops, representatives from both CSOs and local government expressed how their previously held negative attitudes towards one another when it came to social accountability had changed tremendously as a result of the training.

following local organisations played a considerable role in co-convening the sessions in each site: Access International, the Uzalendo Afrika Initiative, and the OSSREA Chapter in Kenya; the Uganda National NGO Forum, the Gulu NGO Forum, and the Community Transformation Foundation Network (COTFONE) in Uganda, and the Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations (CCRDA) in Ethiopia.

The impact

The training provided participants with a platform to interact and share ideas about how social accountability can improve services for the youth. During the workshops, representatives from both CSOs and local government expressed how their previously held negative attitudes towards one another when it came to social accountability had changed tremendously as a result of the training. Local government representatives also committed to work closely with local youth organisations on youth development matters in their respective countries. Following the workshops, participants opted to join the project-led Community of Practice group on WhatsApp (which has over 100 members) to share best practice on youth engagement across countries.

These trainings have yielded substantial results. In Uganda, trainees played a pivotal role in establishing a coalition of NGOs dedicated to social accountability, bringing together various organisations from across the country. They not only conducted training sessions for local CSOs on social accountability practices but also actively participated in multiple initiatives aimed at addressing public service challenges. For instance, COTFONE mobilised community members to advocate against an oil pipeline that would cause the displacement of communities and exacerbate environmental issues. In Kenya, there has been a notable shift in the perception of young people both among local government officials, community leaders and CSOs, and among young people themselves. There is now greater recognition of the importance of having their voices heard and being actively engaged in decision-making processes at various levels. Youth-led organisations such as Uzalendo in Mombasa have advocated for transparency and accountability in local government and public service delivery. Local government participation in the training has led to their acknowledgement of the importance of direct interaction with community-based organisations and CSOs, fostering a more inclusive and participatory approach to governance and policy development. This transformation reflects the positive impact of the programme on youth engagement and the collaborative dynamics between local governments and grass-roots organisations in Kenya. In Ethiopia, plans were made for a youth CSO thinktank focused on social accountability, but these plans were unfortunately put on hold as a result of the conflict which broke out in 2020.

Conclusion

The training of trainers programme was an effective way to share research findings, enable participants to break down barriers between them, and build capacity within their organisations and networks to act on these findings. The project shows how successful youth engagement requires not only training but also a supportive environment, resources, and a genuine commitment to involving young people in shaping policies and programmes.

Further reading

Abera, M.; Legesse, N.; Mukuna, T.E. and Tesfaye, A. (2022) *The Socio-Economic Impact of Covid-19 on Young People in Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa: Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) (accessed 3 November 2023)

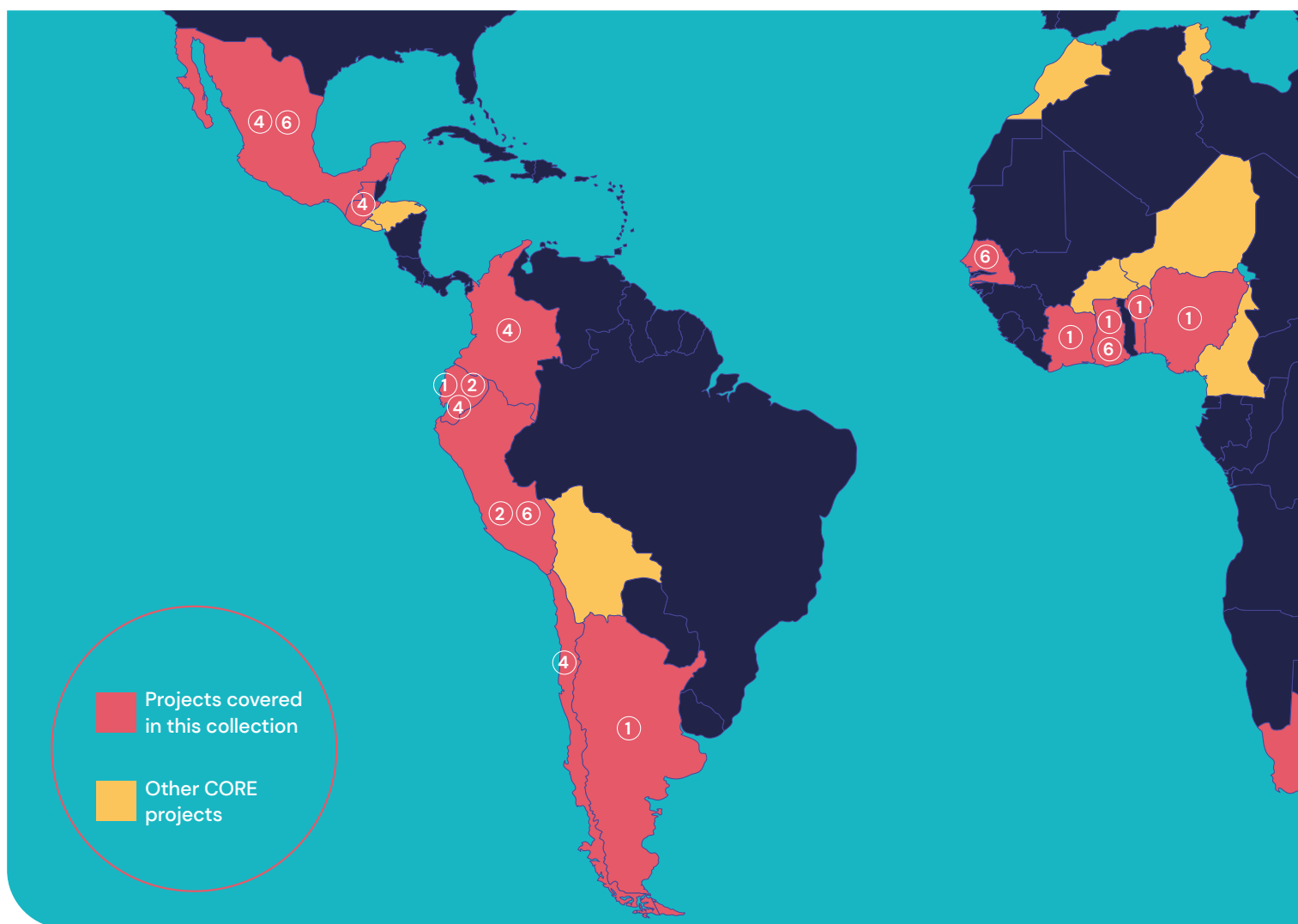
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Tesfaye, A. and Mukuna, T.E. (2023) '*Gendered Impact of Covid-19 on Youth: Findings from "Covid-19 and the Youth Question in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda"*', OSSREA/COYOQA Project Policy Brief, Addis Ababa: (OSSREA) (accessed 3 November 2023)

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① Simulations and Field Experiments of Policy Responses and Interventions to Promote Inclusive Adaptation to and Recovery from the Covid-19 Crisis

Lead partner: Partnership for Economic Policy

Web: www.pep-net.org/

Email: info@pep-net.org

Twitter: [@PEPnetwork](https://twitter.com/PEPnetwork)

This project focuses on the impact of Covid-19 and the effectiveness of current and potential policies in 11 developing countries to identify more effective and inclusive policy responses to, and recovery from, the pandemic.

Argentina, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Vietnam, Zimbabwe



② Building Back Better: Using a Disruptive Crisis to Achieve Sustainable and Gender Inclusive Improvements in Food Security, Labour Markets and Social Protection

Lead partner: Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE)

Web: www.grade.org.pe

Email: proyectos@grade.org.pe

Twitter: [@GRADEPeru](https://twitter.com/GRADEPeru)

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

Ecuador, Peru



③ Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises, Food Security, and Evolving Social Protection Mechanisms to Deal with Covid-19 in Pakistan

Lead partner: Sustainable Development Policy Institute

Web: www.sdpi.org/

Email: ed@sdpi.org

Twitter: [@SDPIPakistan](https://twitter.com/SDPIPakistan)

SDPI is documenting evidence on Covid-19's impact, informing response strategies during relief and recovery phases, and strengthening local research in Pakistan – with a focus on SMEs, food security, and social protection.

Pakistan



④ Sowing Development: Small Scale Agriculture and Food Security Resilient to Covid-19

Lead partner: RIMISP – Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural

Web: www.rimisp.org/

Email: rimisp@rimisp.org

Twitter: [@Rimisp](https://twitter.com/Rimisp)

The project is generating evidence and promoting changes to agri-food systems in the aftermath of the pandemic. It aims to contribute to mitigating the impact on the food security and consumption of the most vulnerable, with particular emphasis on women.

Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico



20 PROJECTS 42 COUNTRIES



⑤ REBUILD: Covid-19 & Women in the Informal Economy in Kenya, Uganda & India

Lead partner: International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

Web: www.icrw.org

Email: info.india@icrw.org

Twitter: [@ICRW](https://twitter.com/ICRW)

This project focuses on urban informal economic activities in India, Kenya, and Uganda. Researchers explored the resilience of and challenges faced by women and their broader social 'ecosystem'. The aim is to inform policies and strategies that ensure vulnerable populations, such as women workers in urban informal economies affected by the Covid-19 pandemic can recover and rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

India, Kenya, Uganda



⑥ Informal Workers and Covid-19: Evidence-Based Responses to the Crisis at the Base of the Economic Pyramid

Lead partner: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)

Web: www.wiego.org

Email: wiego@wiego.org

Twitter: [@wiegoglobal](https://twitter.com/wiegoglobal)

This project focuses on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns on the livelihoods and health of poor workers, especially women, in the informal economy. It will do so using a mixed-methods longitudinal study that includes a large-scale survey of informal workers spanned over 10 cities across 8 countries, with a focus on four groups of informal workers that predominantly employ women: domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors, and waste pickers.

Ghana, India, Mexico, Peru, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand



⑦ Covid-19 and the Youth Question in Africa: Impact, Response and Protection Measures in the IGAD Region (COYOQA)

Lead partner: The Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA)

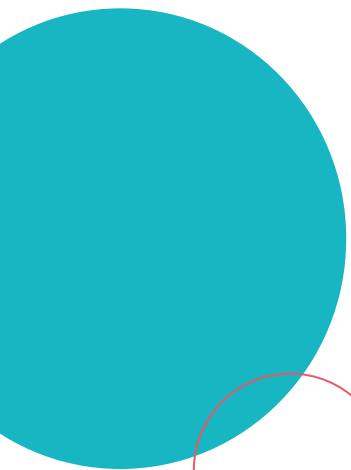
Web: www.ossrea.net

Email: info@ossrea.net

Twitter: [@OSSREA](https://twitter.com/OSSREA)

The project analyses how young people are affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and examines how they can be key actors who can be meaningfully engaged in response mitigation and evaluation efforts while holding their governments to account.

Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda



About this report

This collection was produced by the Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Knowledge Translation (KT) Team as part of the CORE KT Programme, which supports the translation of knowledge emerging from the CORE initiative. Supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), CORE brought together 20 projects to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery.

The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors, or IDS.

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STAY POSITIVE
ಅನಿವಾರ್ಯವಾಗಿ

BE RESPONSIBLE
ಜವಾಬ್ದಾರಿಯುತವಾಗಿ

Covid-19 awareness wall art in Bengaluru, India.
PHOTO: © XARAVANI ART PROJECT
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