Impacts of covid-19 pandemic on rural livelihoods and food security: potential strategies to enhance resilience

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Outline

• Introduction / Background
• Objectives
• Methods
• Results and Discussion
• Conclusion
• Selected references
• Acknowledgement
Introduction

- Covid 19 impacted many aspects of life beside health.
- Developing countries struggled to cope.
- Marginally placed people in societies have suffered the most: elderly, women, children, those involved in farming and informal business sector (Cooperazione International, 2020; Ebrahim, 2020; Chirau, 2016).
- COVID-19 induced hunger and malnutrition can kill or incapacitate more people than Covid-19 itself (Fanzo 2020; HLPE 2020a, 2020b; UN 2020).
- Communities with weaker social safety nets are more vulnerable.

Photo: M. Chitakira
Introduction

• Prolonged lockdowns in RSA exposed societies (especially rural ones) with weak and vulnerable economic foundations (Ebrahima, 2020).

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Objectives

• The objectives of the study are to:
  • compile the impacts of covid-19 pandemic on rural livelihoods and food security (from literature & then from surveys),
  • evaluate the response mechanisms used (individual and institutional)
  • establish and recommend sustainable response strategies to enhance resilience of rural communities in South Africa.

• NOTE: This presentation will address only part of the objectives – it’s work in progress.
Methods

- Case Study design – rural communities in South Africa
- Qualitative approach:
  - First part of study: Review of documents/literature;
  - Later part of study: In-depth interviews.
- The RSA among top 5 countries in terms of number of COVID-19 cases in the world.

Results and Discussion:
COVID-19 pandemic challenges on rural livelihoods

- RSA lockdown was one of the strictest - strict curfews & informal sector closed - food system and flow of goods significantly affected (Paganini et al. 2020).
- Hunger and unemployment became more severe – nationally, 34% went to bed hungry (HSRC, 2020).
- Farming business temporarily closed / slowed down - Commercial farm workers (often from local villages) lost income.
- Informal sector workers lost income - urban and rural areas affected.
- No market - business stalls closed due to lockdown.
- Female-headed households affected most - nearly 50% of female-headed households did not have an employed person in 2020 (HSRC, 2020).
- Increased theft of farm produce not yet harvested;

Rise in Unemployment in 2020

Institute for Economic Justice, Section 27 & Center for Economic and Social Rights (2020).
Results and Discussion: Impact on rural food security

- Pillars of food security affected, including availability, access, utilization.
- Decline production of staple crops (maize, dry beans, soybeans) despite suitable rains (Mthembu et al. 2022).
- Some positive impacts reported but negative impacts were predominant.
- Absence of extension services had negative impact on food production and supply.

Results and Discussion: Impact on rural food security

- Rural people forced to eat less or skip meals; women affected more than men (25% and 22%, respectively). (Gender Perspective South Africa, 2020).
- Increases in food prices triggered changes in household diets (Panganini et al 2020).
- National average percentage of people facing severe food insecurity increased to 23,6% in 2020 (StatsSA, 2022)
Results and Discussion:

Response by farmers

• Farmers looked for new markets – e.g. in Cape Town, township communities and neighbourhoods became main markets for farmers.

• Farmers established neighborhood WhatsApp marketing groups; also resorted to advertise produce by word-of-mouth (Panganini et al 2020).

• Some resorted to selling more produce door-to-door in neighbourhood – increased sales reported.

• Farmers also adopted by:
  • Sharing food in community via neighbourhood WhatsApp groups;
  • limited food intake;
  • bought food on credit;
  • growing more food.
Results and Discussion:

Institutional Response

• Government support included:
  
  • COVID-19 relief grants – but limited number of farmers accessed this (Wegerif, 2022);
  
  • new social protection grants; food parcels; other cash and supplies for prevention (Gender Perspective South Africa, 2020).

• Lack of effective mitigation of the impacts of lockdown on farmers.

• A more structured approach to enabling and sustaining farmers required, especially black farmers, considering existing racial inequalities (Wegerif, 2022).

• Making efforts to improve vaccine uptake - vaccine hesitancy a challenge (Ueckermann, 2021).
Conclusion:
Potential Strategies recommended

• Empower women to reduce overdependence on men. (Ndinda, Ngungu, Adebayo, Moolman, Chimbwete, Lynch, Shozi, 2020).

• COVID-19 policies and legislations that are sensitive to the conditions of poor rural communities are needed.

• Small-scale farmers need to reduce vulnerability through social safety nets; improve resilience through increasing their adaptive capacity.
Conclusion:

Potential Strategies recommended

• Improving the adaptive capacity of small-scale farmers is not enough – should holistically address the weaknesses inherent in the food system.

• Limited literature / reports on rural experience. More research recommended.
Selected References


• StatsSA. 2022. How COVID-19 affected food security in SA. https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=15273&qclid=Cj0KCQjw06OTBhC_ARIsAAU1yOWxlyveut4D0iAu_oJYkgGAl2kGBS6uoG8nrYrweeX5-QHk2iGHUZQaAuwEEALw_wcB (accessed on 15 April 2022).


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Thank You

Comments / Questions?
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