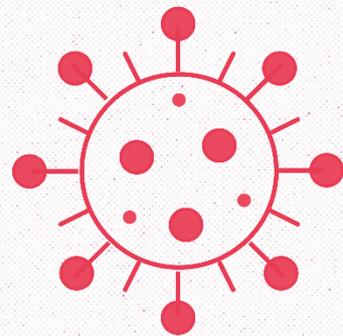


Strømme Foundation
Poverty Report 2021

Lessons learned
from a crisis:
How the Covid -19
pandemic hit the poor

What happens in a family in a poor, rural village, when a major crisis hits the country, and the entire world comes to a halt? And what factors ensure household and community resilience in the face of a major shock?



Resty (16) from Uganda was in 8th grade when the pandemic closed classrooms across the whole country on 20 March 2020. Then she got pregnant.



Acknowledgments

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ACRONYMS

COVID-19 – Disease caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2
DRR – Disaster Risk Reduction
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization
ILO – International Labour Organization
NGO – Non-governmental Organisation
NNM – New Normal Community Mapping
OOSC – Out of School Children
SDG – Sustainable Development Goals
SF – Strømme Foundation
UBOS – Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UN – United Nations
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

Foreword

The Strømme Foundation (SF) commissioned this report to summarise the findings and analysis from the “New Normal Community Mapping” study to assess the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in its own areas of intervention. During the first part of 2021, the mapping was conducted in the Sahel region of West Africa (Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali), East-Africa (South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya), and in Asia (Nepal and Bangladesh).

The methodology used was a mix of quantitative data (household and individual surveys), qualitative interviews (focus groups and key informants) and a desk review of secondary sources. The original purpose of the mapping was to collect data to inform Strømme Foundation’s programmes. However, for a broader audience, the report provides a valuable snapshot of the reality faced by communities in some of the poorest countries in the world because of the pandemic.

The New Normal Mapping (NNM) provides real-life evidence of the consequences faced by households as a result of national lockdowns in some of the most vulnerable communities in each country. Its focus also extends further into the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. As such, the findings and recommendations should be of interest to the broader development context: community leaders, policy makers, and development and humanitarian actors.

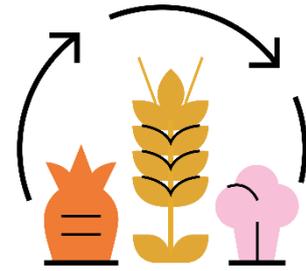
In brief, the findings confirm much of the analysis that has been carried out by global actors such as the United Nations and the World Bank on the ripple effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, it also provides some valuable lessons learned for future crises and disaster preparedness.



Key findings

Development challenges have been turned into a humanitarian crisis as the pandemic pushed additional millions into extreme poverty. The ongoing food security crisis was already – not least in the Sahel region of West Africa - emerging prior to the pandemic, caused by unpredictable climate conditions, and aggravated by the volatile security situation.

This, in combination with a rise in food and commodity prices and restrained access to markets and food supply reinforced by the pandemic, has underlined the importance of sustainable local food production and availability.



Reduced food security and job/income losses force households to make use of negative or unsustainable ways of coping, such as reducing the number of meals eaten per day, selling assets, exhausting savings, or keeping children out of school through child marriage or child labour.

Negative or unsustainable ways of coping deplete household resources and **make them more vulnerable** in the face of recurrent shocks or crises.



Women and youth are most affected by the economic crisis since they are more frequently informally employed.

Violence and abuse levels have been high throughout the pandemic, particularly affecting women and children.

Closed schools have led to substantial learning gaps, increased the risk of children dropping out, and resulted in teachers leaving the profession, with the risk of a “lost generation” of learners as a result.



Being part of strong civil society structures and/or having access to one's own food production leads to stronger resilience in the face of crisis, providing better food security and an additional safety net for community members.



Main recommendations

Reinforce food security

- For communities to recover and emerge stronger from the pandemic, both in the short and longer term, food security will be a crucial factor. Since it is a “trigger” for several unsustainable coping strategies, addressing food security will positively impact a range of other development factors, including education, child marriage and child labour.
- Short term: humanitarian / development collaboration and mixed approaches will be necessary to achieve this. One example is school feeding initiatives which will have an impact on the immediate nutrition levels of children, as well as serving as an incentive for school retention and enrolment.
- Long term: boosting local food production through climate-adapted agriculture will be an important factor in preparing households and communities for the next crisis.

Invest in education

- To avoid a “lost generation” of learners, substantial investments are required:
 - To ensure effective enrolment and reenrolment of out of school children (OOSC)
 - To enhance the infrastructure and equipment of schools
 - To ensure schools are adequately staffed
 - To prepare and train teachers to handle a substantial learning gap among existing students, while at the same time effectively enrolling new students.
- In addition, the need to ensure psychosocial care for students will have increased during the pandemic.

Prioritize Disaster Risk Reduction

- Development approaches that address the pandemic and its aftermath must focus on the building and rebuilding of resilient households and communities to ensure preparedness for recurrent crises.
- To achieve this, approaches need to be holistic and integrated. For example, effective educational programmes are highly dependent on a safe context for children, food security, a predictable household economy, and food security.
- Humanitarian components in combination with long-term development initiatives will be necessary in many cases.

Continue to empower civil society

- In a crisis, strong and mature civil society structures ensure both social action and an additional safety net, and therefore contribute to community resilience.
- To ensure effective community mobilisation in the future, approaches to strengthening civil society must be rights-based and empowering.
- The pandemic has confirmed the need to build upon communities’ own strengths to address risks and face recurrent crises.
- Ensuring sufficient space for a vibrant civil society is an important key to building strong and resilient communities.



Background: Covid-19 and its global consequences

“The crisis has demonstrated more clearly than ever the importance of disaster preparedness and robust social protection systems”, (UN, 2021).

The world is still taking stock in terms of the full impact of Covid-19 on global poverty. The pandemic is causing an unprecedented global socioeconomic crisis. Extreme poverty due to Covid-19 is projected to increase globally by 97 million people in 2021, with sub-Saharan Africa taking one third of the impact (World Bank, 2021a). In low-income countries, pandemic ripple effects are expected to last for several years. Decades of progress on poverty, education, employment, and gender equality is at high risk of being reversed.

A global economic crisis

The pandemic has caused a global loss of jobs equivalent to four times the number lost during the 2008 financial crisis (UN, 2021)

The informal service sector, which employs mostly women and young people, has been struck the hardest by lockdowns and other pandemic restrictions (ILO, 2020). The pandemic has caused the worst global economic crisis in 150 years (World

Bank, 2020). The crisis has **exacerbated the inequality gap** between the most and the least vulnerable populations (World Bank, 2021b).

A worsening food security situation

A child who goes hungry to bed has a 60% higher risk of being married away (World Vision, 2021)

Hunger is a powerful driving force for **unsustainable coping strategies**, such as selling productive assets (for example tools), exhausting savings, asking for loans, consuming next season’s seeds, or taking children out of school. **Child marriage** is one of many common

responses used by vulnerable households in the event of a crisis. In the Sahel region of West Africa, the pandemic has reinforced an already deteriorating **food security** situation, originally caused by armed conflict and climate change, resulting in higher food prices and limited access to food (WFP, 2021).

An education crisis

90% of students worldwide have been affected by school closures, causing a substantial learning gap (UN, 2020a)

Children in rural and vulnerable communities are least likely to benefit from alternative teaching methods implemented during school closures, resulting in **considerable learning gaps**.

The risk of many **children not returning to school** after they reopen is also considerable. The **lack of qualified teachers** will be a challenge as schools reopen. School and work closures have put vulnerable children, girls, and women at a higher risk of violence, abuse, and other human rights violations. UNICEF (2020) warns that progress made in the past decades, particularly in **enrolment and learning outcomes for girls**, is now at risk of being lost.



Shrinking space for civil society

A strong and empowered civil society is key to community resilience in a time of crisis. Paradoxically, there is a global concern that government imposed Covid-19 restrictions are being used to shrink the space and capability of civil society actors (ICNL, 2020).

Key findings in SF intervention areas

From a local perspective, the findings of Strømme Foundation’s New Normal Mapping reflect the global situation regarding the pandemic ripple effects to a significant extent:

<p>FOOD CRISIS Food crisis in an already vulnerable context</p> <p><i>Examples</i> WEST AFRICA: - Pre-covid: 75% ate 3 meals a day. Post-covid only 11% - More than 50% had cheaper/less nutritious food</p>	<p>EDUCATION CRISIS High drop-out rates, learning gaps and unprepared schools</p> <p><i>Examples</i> EAST AFRICA: - 1 in 5 children not likely to return to school - Time spent on learning during lockdowns: 12% compared to normal</p>	<p>ECONOMIC CRISIS Increased vulnerability for future crises</p> <p><i>Examples</i> WEST AFRICA: - 7 in 10 lost income - 1 in 4 sold productive assets and/or consumed next season’s seeds</p>	<p>VIOLENCE AND ABUSE Vulnerable structures in communities leave individuals unprotected</p> <p><i>Examples</i> EAST AFRICA: - 1 in 5 children experienced sexual abuse. - Hunger led to 60% higher risk of child marriage</p>
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Economy and food security: An acute crisis and reduced long-term resilience

Households that lost income, 9 months into the pandemic:
East Africa: 62% West Africa: 69%

In East Africa, one third of respondents had **lost their jobs**. The proportion of households reporting that they **lost income** was higher than those reporting job loss, indicating a high proportion of informally employed.

For people involved in income generating activities, reduced access to markets and raw materials were key challenges throughout the pandemic.



West Africa:
27.4% of households sold one or more productive assets

The effects of the pandemic on livelihoods are reflected in the loss of income and employment and the high prevalence of **negative coping strategies** to maintain consumption, such as selling assets for production (tools, equipment etc), the consumption

of next season's seeds, and the exhaustion of savings to buy food and other basic goods, all of which contribute to weaker household resilience to future shocks and crises.

In Niger:
97% of households ate 2 or 3 meals per day before the pandemic
9 months later, 57% ate only one meal

The NNM study also showed a rapid decline in **food security, reaching critical levels in many communities. Reduction in food diversity and number of meals**, a coping strategy used by more than half of West African respondents to reduce food costs, is likely to negatively affect family **nutrition**.

Education: The risk of a “lost generation” of learners

1 in 5
Caretakers stated that
“It is UNLIKELY or UNCERTAIN that my children will return to school after reopening”

18%
Girls (ages 6-12) in East Africa experienced sexual abuse during lockdown

Children and adolescents have been forced to remain out of school for long periods of time. This is particularly evident in East Africa, and most prominently in Uganda, where schools have been closed for nearly two years. The pandemic has led to **substantially higher dropout risks**.

Important reasons for dropout include a higher prevalence of child labour, early pregnancy, and child marriage, as well as the fear of stigma attached to repeating academic years. The **prevalence of child abuse** peaked during the pandemic, reinforcing the education crisis, with nearly half of perpetrators being family members.

3.6 hours
Average time per week that primary school students spent on learning during lockdown

The actual **time spent on learning** by students during lockdown was very low – as little as 12% as compared to a normal school year, creating **substantial learning gaps**. Even when alternative learning methods (e.g., paper-based methods, radio, digital resources, etc.) were put in place, it seems evident that these measures were not sufficient to compensate for the loss of fully operational schools.



Teachers drop-out rates have risen during the pandemic. Reports from Bangladesh refer to high levels of teacher stress (as much as 70% in private schools) due to salary non-payment and potential job loss.

The situation has led many to leave the profession in search of work elsewhere, potentially **leaving schools unprepared** to address re-enrolment needs and the increasing learning gap among students.

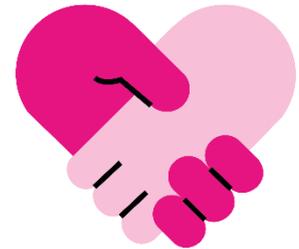


Resilience factors

What makes a community resilient when facing a crisis? The New Normal Mapping has brought to light some valuable lessons learned in preparation for future crises:

The importance of strong and empowered communities

Being part of strong, empowered, and well-organised civil society structures is considered an added strength for households and community members when facing a shock of this magnitude. Community-based organisations have ensured bottom-up support during the pandemic, as well as advice, Covid-19 sensitisation, financial support, and protection in the form of organised community action and advocacy.



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Child marriages prevented by adolescent empowerment groups in Rupandehi district, Nepal, April 2021

At their best, local structures have played a social protection role where government actors have not had the capacity to uphold public services.

As an example, members of savings groups in West Africa expressed that being part of a group increased their awareness on the Covid-19 virus and preventive measures which otherwise they would have not obtained from the local authorities, expanding on the otherwise traditional role of a savings group to reinforce financial resilience.

However, the presence of civil society structures is not in itself a “miracle cure” for community resilience; their degree of effectiveness depends to a great extent on their level of maturity, empowerment, and sense of purpose.

In brief, groups formed with a technical purpose (such as savings groups) have played less of a role as a community resilience factor when compared to groups formed with empowerment and rights foci as their core purposes.



Prepare for future shocks by building back better.

It is imperative that communities not only recover from the pandemic but that they use this experience to become better prepared for future crises.

Access to food production and resilient agriculture

Food security was the main concern for the target groups interviewed for the NNM. An acute and deteriorating food security situation is a barrier to education, as well as a driving force behind child marriage and unsustainable coping strategies. Households with access to food production have proven to be more resilient throughout the crisis.

However, the past two years have highlighted how an additional shock – in this case the pandemic - can aggravate an already fragile food security situation. There is a need to explore how local, resilient, and climate-adapted agriculture can reinforce food security in the face of recurrent crises.

Introduction: Covid-19 and community resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic accentuated the need for families and communities to strengthen their resilience to be able to care for themselves in the absence of external support. Resilience, described as “coping without crisis” (Tearfund), is the ability to withstand shocks and negative trends before they turn into a crisis, and to adapt effectively once the shock is a reality.

It can be observed and strengthened at multiple levels, such as at individual, household, community, organisational, local, and national levels. A resilient community is one that is considered knowledgeable, healthy and can meet its basic needs, it is socially cohesive, has economic opportunities, has well-maintained and accessible infrastructure and services, can manage its natural assets, and is connected. (IFRC, 2014).

Findings from the NNM indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected communities in many ways. There is considerable concern that the impacts of the pandemic have left households and communities less resilient and prepared for future shocks, as emerging needs trigger unsustainable coping strategies. An additional cause for concern is that civil society structures, an important safety net and resilience factor for communities, have been put under severe pressure due to – or under the pretext of – COVID-19 restrictions. The space for civil society has shrunk further during the pandemic, in some cases as an intended strategy from governments.

What makes a household or a local community resilient is a complex question. The NNM highlights some of the most crucial resilience factors, and how they were influenced or impacted by the pandemic: livelihoods and food security; education; and a vibrant civil society. The following sections elaborate further on findings related to these factors.

Restoring resilience in communities is essential both to accelerate recovery and to ensure that communities are prepared for the next shock or crisis. Moving forward, a dual perspective through humanitarian/development collaboration will be necessary to restore resilience and alleviate immediate needs such as food distribution in the most vulnerable communities. In addition,

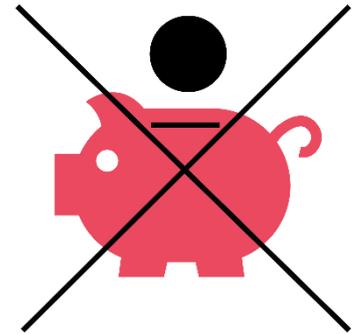


pursuing a holistic approach to community development using disaster risk reduction (DRR) frameworks and working in partnerships across complementary disciplines such as agriculture, health and nutrition, education, and job creation will be an advantage.

Section 1. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY

‘Even before the pandemic hit, global economic growth had slowed. The COVID-19 crisis disrupted economic activities around the world and caused the worst recession since the Great Depression. In 2020, 8.8 per cent of global working hours were lost (relative to the fourth quarter of 2019), equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs – about four times the number lost during the global financial crisis in 2009.

The pandemic has put workers in informal employment at risk, as they lack protection against illness or lockdowns. Young workers and women have been particularly affected by the crisis. For many other countries, economic growth will remain below pre-pandemic trends for a prolonged period’ (UN, 2021)



The COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis of monumental proportions, with catastrophic effects on people’s livelihoods. The pandemic began as a health crisis but has triggered a parallel economic crisis with severe consequences for the poor and the vulnerable. The World Bank states that the pandemic is causing the worst global recession in the last 150 years, equal to a 4.9% global economic contraction.

A decline of 3.6% in global income per capita will tip millions of people into extreme poverty (World Bank, 2020). The ILO (2020) points to the informal sector being the hardest hit. Almost 1.6 billion informal economy workers were significantly impacted by lockdown measures, and/or work in the most affected sectors.

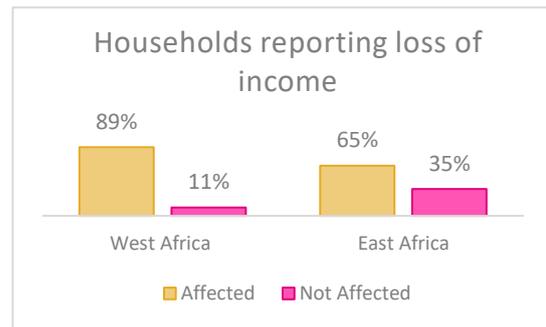
The pandemic has exposed and intensified inequalities within and among countries. According to the World Bank (2021b), COVID-19 has been called the ‘Inequality Pandemic’, undoubtedly suggesting that the impact in poorer regions will be worse than in richer regions. Impact data from all over the world show that income losses and hunger were more common among households in poorer countries (ibid).

Within countries, employment and income losses were felt more severely by informal workers, women, youth, and those with less education. Findings from SF’s NNM reiterate this. The pandemic has not only reversed social and economic progress, but it is also threatening the stability of the state in several countries in which SF is active and where communities increasingly require humanitarian aid to restore food security, health, education, and economic wellbeing.



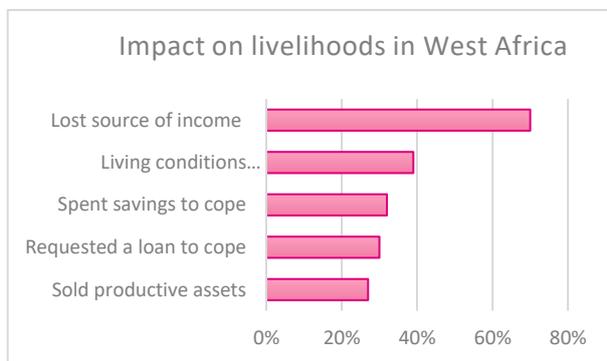
In SF’s areas of intervention in East Africa, measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the region, combined with international ripple effects, had a major impact on household livelihoods.

On average, 65% of targeted households reported losing their income. In West Africa, the results are even bleaker, with an average of 89% of households losing income during the initial nine months of the pandemic.



More than 70% of targeted households in Uganda and Kenya reported that restrictions had a high to very high impact on their livelihoods. These two countries had stricter government restrictions to contain the spread of the disease such as border closures, social distancing, quarantines and a ban on all public gatherings and non-essential services.

This led to closure of schools and all education institutions, markets, and businesses. East Africa, a region struggling with widespread poverty, hunger, and malnutrition even before Covid-19, was impacted by the loss of income especially for those working in the informal sector who depend on daily wages and had no opportunity to work from home. Lockdowns and restrictions also caused disruption of food systems (Kansiime, et al. 2020).



In West Africa, NNM results show that 70% of respondents with an income-generating activity (IGA) in the informal sector lost all or part of their income during the first months of the pandemic. The main reason on the supply side was difficulties in obtaining raw materials which hindered the production of goods.

On the demand side, access to buyers and markets was not possible due to movement restrictions, or marketing simply disappeared

due to economic setbacks and a shift in priorities among buyers.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed chronic development flaws in Asia, which took a heavy toll on the social and economic well-being of people in the region (ESCAP, 2021). The loss of working hours was equivalent to 140 million full-time jobs in 2020, while prolonged school closures severely affected education. Poor and vulnerable groups were disproportionately affected, resulting in a surge in poverty and a widening of inequality gaps that is likely to have considerable adverse effects on human capital accumulation and productivity.

Poverty increased in SF’s areas of intervention because of lockdowns and related public health measures. In Bangladesh, SF partners reported a four-fold increase in family poverty and increased debt in 2020, resulting in the inability of many households to meet basic needs. In Nepal, 67% of targeted households experienced a reduction in income from wage labour and remittances from workers abroad. The loss of income impacted household food consumption and loan repayment. As a result, extreme poverty increased 7% in SF’s areas of intervention in Nepal.



Food security

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed additional threats to global food security and nutrition. The rise in unemployment and the subsequent deterioration in livelihoods and sources of income for millions of marginalised families meant an increase in households cutting down on the quantity and quality of their food consumption.

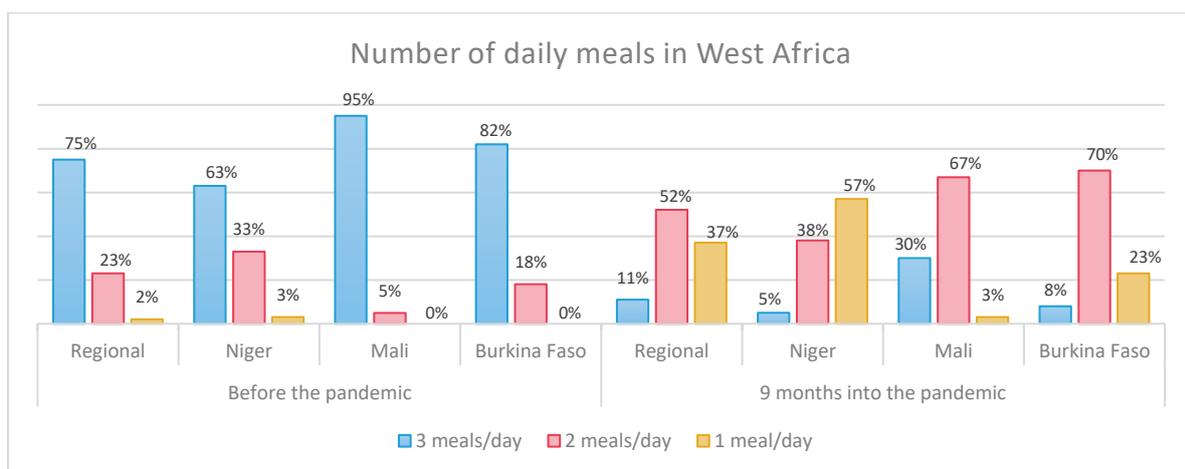
Nearly one in three people in the world (2.37 billion) were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2020 (UN, 2021). This implies that families ate a less balanced and nutritious diet on a regular basis, ran out of food, or worse, went days without eating.



COVID-19 seems to have magnified an already challenging and deteriorating food security situation in West Africa. The impacts of the pandemic – restricting access to markets, disrupting supply chains, and causing an increase in food prices - came on top of the cumulative effects of drought, insecurity, and internal displacement. Food insecurity levels were twice as high in families headed by women (WFP, 2021). While humanitarian assistance is urgently necessary across the region, longer term resilience building to ensure local and sustainable food security is also required (ibid).

Results from the NNM in West Africa confirm a marked deterioration in food security for households in SF’s areas of intervention. Before the onset of national lockdowns in March 2020, 75% of targeted households ate three meals a day. After nine months, only 11% of households ate three meals a day, while 52% ate two meals a day and 37% ate one meal a day.

The effect was particularly severe in Niger, a country marked by continued armed conflict, large population displacement, structural poverty, and extreme climate shocks, and where households experienced further socio-economic deterioration and an exponential increase in needs because of Covid-19 restrictions. Consequently, 69% of households in Niger were worried about not having enough food to eat as opposed to 27% in Mali and 44% in Burkina Faso.

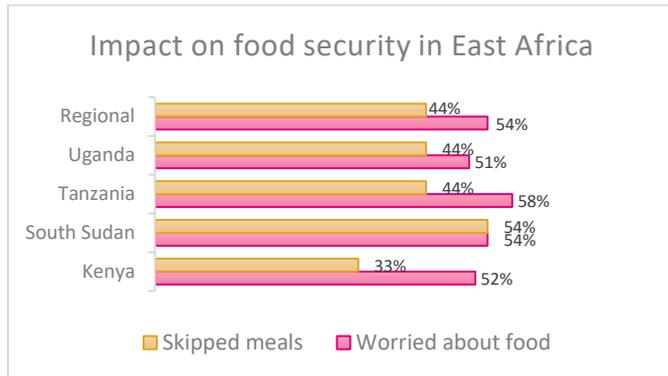


A similar situation emerged in the East Africa region, where findings from the NNM study showed that 54% of targeted households were worried about their food consumption and 44% were forced to skip meals due to declining food stocks. South Sudan experienced a severe impact given their



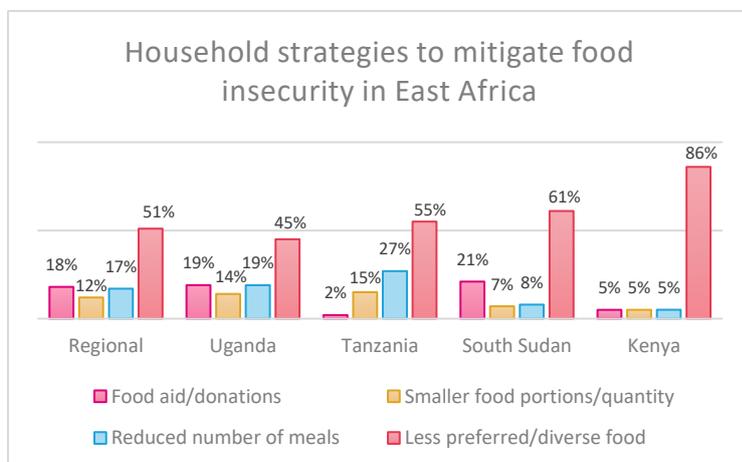
dependency on food imports, and from the restrictions imposed at borders that affected the food value chain.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (2020), restrictions affected distribution of and access to food from production to consumption with the greatest threats to food security and nutrition coming via a collapse in the global demand for internationally produced agri-food products, growing disruptions to local food markets and increasing food access issues due to loss of critical income sources.



Indeed, the impact on food security in the East Africa region was mainly caused by a loss of income, higher food prices, limited access to food markets, and large families, due to the restrictions imposed to reduce the spread of Covid-19. The return of migrant family members and schoolchildren forced to stay at home meant an increase in mouths to feed which exacerbated an already dire situation. With declining food reserves, households used different strategies to avoid starvation.

On average, 51% of targeted households began consuming less preferred food items (i.e., cheaper and/or less nutritious). Households also reduced the number of meals and the size of food portions. These practices can potentially lead to poor diets and malnutrition in women and children given that most households could not afford certain foods in the right frequency and quantities. Some households were forced to rely on donations and on foraging for food. Other households turned to eating the seeds reserved for the next cropping season.



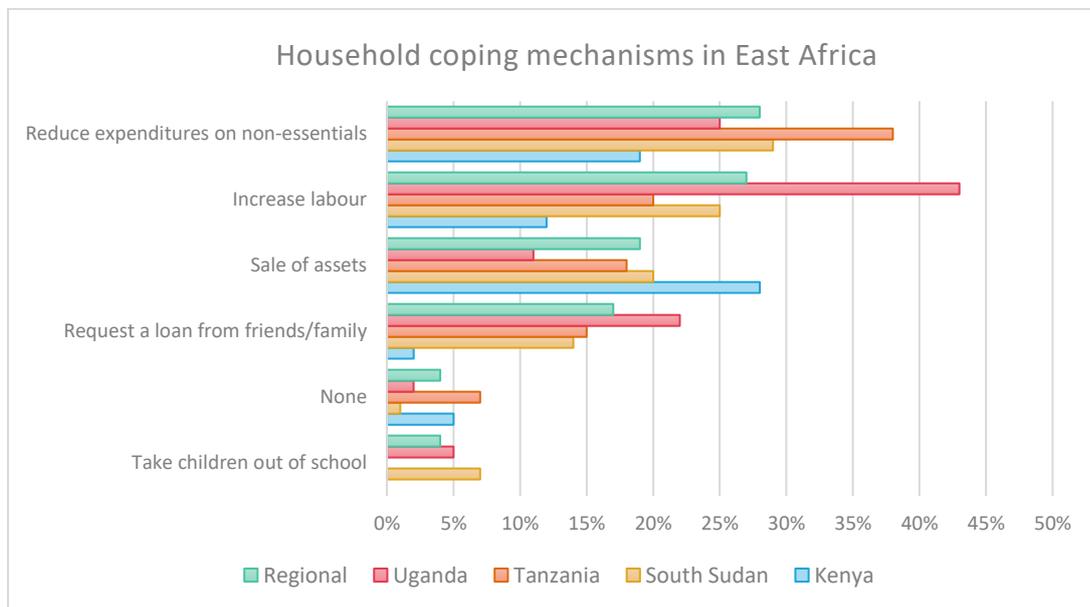


Household coping mechanisms

Individuals living in poor households face a double misfortune: difficulties in generating income and an increased vulnerability to negative shocks. In the absence of social protection or insurance, households facing income shocks such as illness, unemployment, natural disasters, or epidemics, adopt different coping mechanisms to maintain their food consumption. Household wellbeing can be significantly reduced not only as a direct result of negative shocks, but also because of the constraints that households face to protect their consumption. Poor households often resort to negative coping strategies, such as selling productive assets, taking out high-interest loans or dropping out of school, which can leave them trapped in poverty (ESCAP, 2021). This has been observed in SF’s targeted communities through the NNM study.

Communities in SF’s areas of intervention relied on various methods of survival during the pandemic. In East Africa, households took different measures to cope with income loss. The NNM study reveals that the most common strategy was to reduce expenditures of non-essential goods such as entertainment (28% of the households).

As lockdowns were instituted across the region and individuals were forced to close their businesses, households responded by increasing casual work and on-farm labour for agricultural production to ensure access to food (27% of households). Households also sold household assets (19%) and borrowed from family and friends (17%) to cover their financial needs.



Diversification into agriculture afforded a safety net, providing a basic source of food and income for agricultural societies since the onset of COVID-19 not only in the East Africa region but also in Asia. In Bangladesh, national restrictions limited travel, gatherings, and access to markets. As a result, household members lost their jobs and families and were forced to sell livestock to buy food. Severe and frequent flooding similarly impacted incomes and displaced homesteads.

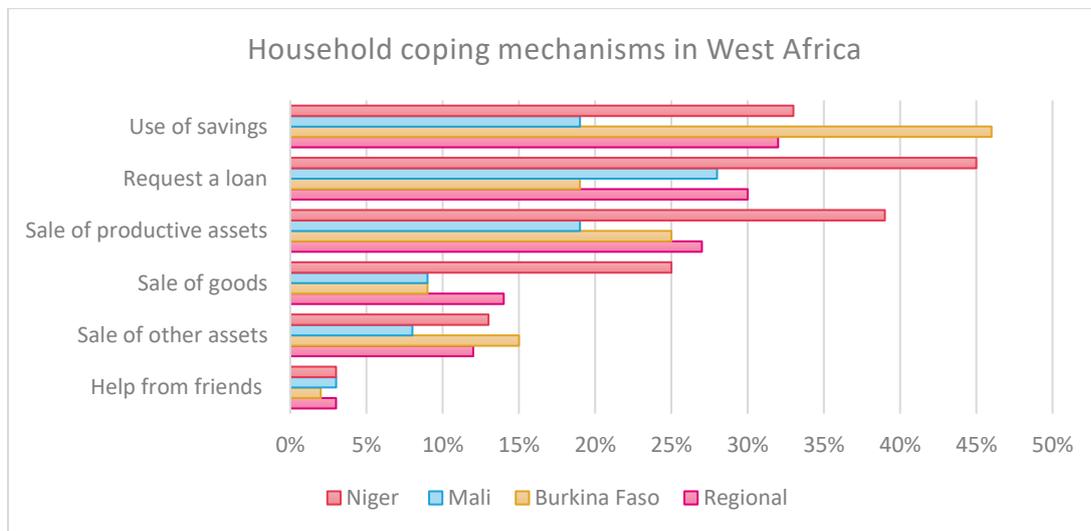


As a response, SF partners introduced alternative growing methods and climate-smart agriculture to supplement household incomes and nutrition. Using techniques such as floating beds on waterlogged and unused ponds or channels, households were able to grow rice and vegetables even during the rainy season.

In Sri Lanka, at the beginning of the pandemic, 88% of households in SF’s areas of intervention experienced a drop in their income and 42% had to sell livestock or other assets to cope. Farmers struggled to buy fertiliser and access veterinary services, while facing challenges in getting products to the market due to curfews and restrictions on mobility. However, 77% of families got involved in agri-businesses during the pandemic and were able to establish market linkages which help cut out exploitative middlemen, and 55% were able to increase their income by the end of 2020.

In West Africa, households took several measures to cushion the adverse income effects of the Covid-19 impact. The main coping strategies were the use of savings (average 32%) and requesting a loan (average 30%); while help from friends and community support were not widely used given that these coping mechanisms break down in the face of a shock that affects the whole community or country.

For households that took out loans, the money was mainly used to meet basic needs such as purchasing food (55% of respondents), strengthening of income-generating activities (36%), and to support children's education (30%).



Supporting the recovery of household livelihoods and food security

A large food emergency is looming in many parts of the world. To avoid some of the worst impacts, a transition to more efficient, sustainable, and resilient foods systems will require integrated approaches for better management of land, soil, and water (FAO, 2020). Smallholder farmers are key actors in food production systems but are often less likely to have the resources, opportunities and voice needed to maintain their livelihoods when exposed to shocks.

For example, in Niger where households rely mainly on rainfed agriculture and extensive livestock



production for their livelihoods, providing households with agricultural assistance and capacity building is essential to quickly improve food security.

As elaborated earlier, the pandemic is also a jobs and livelihoods crisis that threatens progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. Small and medium-sized enterprises, informal workers, the self-employed and migrants have been hit the hardest. In this context the importance of creating an environment that encourages new employment and skills training can be seen as critical.

There is a need for post COVID-19 programmes that focus on support of resilient livelihoods by providing for immediate material needs or working capital such as food aid, cash grants or low-interest loans with the aim of increasing earnings, assets, and economic resilience among the extremely poor and vulnerable.

Programmes should also be innovative and consider the use of digital tools such as mobile money or the delivery of remote vocational and skills training. Clearly this must go together with advocacy to the government and linkages with the private sector to expand digital access using the internet and smartphones. Entrepreneurs and the self-employed will require continued virtual support and guidance to devise strategies to adapt their business practice.

The design and implementation of humanitarian/development hybrid solutions will be critical to provide short-term aid and long-term support (agriculture and food chain development) to ensure food security and support livelihoods.



Incomes ceased when the pandemic broke

The corona pandemic put a stop to the shop belonging to Sita Belem and her husband. To get by, they had to resort to their kitchen garden, hens, and the family's granary.



Sita Belem (40), her husband and five children live in the village of Reko, a few miles north of the capital Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. In 2019, she and 24 other women joined a community savings group run by SF's partner ADEFAD. It was the first savings group in the village. The group was named "Relwendé", which in the local mossi language means "to surrender oneself to God".

"When we started our group, I knew little about how to earn

money. I had worked at home and done housework. My husband, who is a shopkeeper, took care of the income. But he didn't have anything against me joining a group like this. We began to save in the group. In the beginning it was 250 CFA – c. 4NOK – per week. After 34 weeks I had saved 8500 CFA. Now we have increased our savings to 500 CFA per week," explains Sita Belem.

Right at the start, she did not want to borrow money from the group. It was too frightening. But after a while, she took the first step. She borrowed money to buy sugar and spices, which she then sold. "The sales went well, and I got more and more customers. After some time, I started to sell couscous too; it's a grain made from the semolina of durum wheat. I was really praised by my husband and children for what I had managed to do," she says.

Soon she earned enough money to be able to cover some of the expenses at home. Then the corona pandemic hit. The markets were closed, and it was no longer allowed to meet in larger groups. The business ran out more and more, and sales stopped almost completely. "We heard about this new disease. But we were certain that it was something which would hit the West, not us. Later we understood that it would come to us as well," says Belem.

The result was dramatic. The restrictions meant that Belem's husband had to remain at home and was not able to go to work. His sales took a dive, and the income was considerably reduced.

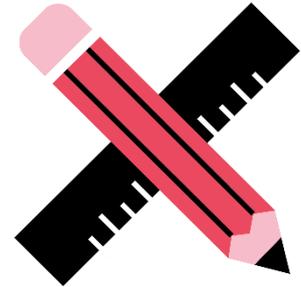
"What could we do? The income was gone. We live in a village and have some land we can farm. We made a kitchen garden and started growing vegetables. We have hens and could gather eggs. Together with the rest of the family, we also have a granary. That's what's keeping us going now. It means that I think we will be able to get through this", says Belem.

Photo and story by: Fatoumata Dembélé



Section 2. Impact of COVID-19 on Education

‘Before the pandemic, progress in education was already too slow to achieve Goal 4 by 2030. One year into the crisis, two in three students were still affected by full or partial school closures. One hundred million more children than before fail to demonstrate basic reading skills. The poorest and most vulnerable children are bearing the brunt of the crisis, exacerbating longstanding inequalities. Many risk never returning to school; some are forced into child marriage or child labour. Special efforts are required to recover learning losses caused by COVID-19’ (UN, 2021)

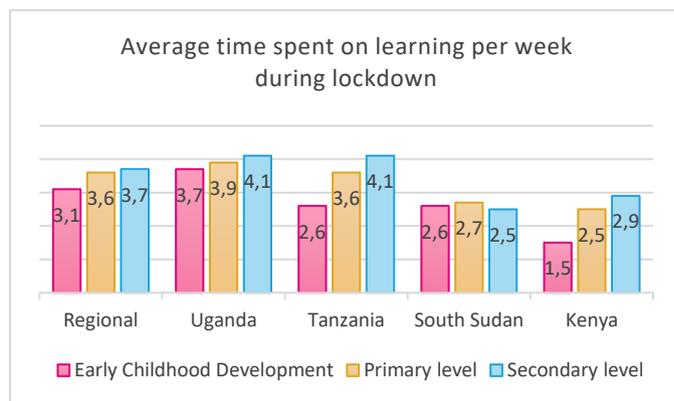


90% of students worldwide have been affected by school closures. 100 million additional students are expected to fall below the minimum proficiency level in reading due to pandemic restrictions on education (UNESCO, 2021). In the countries included in the NNM, the length of school closures varied between 3 to 4 months (West Africa region) to close to two years (Uganda).

Currently, the spread of the Omicron variant is increasing the possibility that governments reimpose strict lockdowns and school closures. The world, and not least its most vulnerable communities, are at risk of seeing a “lost generation” of learners, unless robust measures are taken, and substantial investments are made in education.

Learning gaps and effectiveness of alternative learning methods

The NNM has revealed a dramatic reduction in the time spent on learning during lockdowns. Primary school children surveyed in East Africa spent as little as 3.6 hours a week on learning, the equivalent of 12% of the time they spent learning before schools were closed. The result for many of these students is a substantial learning gap (UN, 2020a).



Children in rural and remote communities were less likely to benefit from alternative teaching methods implemented during the pandemic. This is due to limited access to the necessary equipment and infrastructure, such as televisions, radios, computers, or internet access. The technology gap between rich and poor, and urban and rural students has been exacerbated during the pandemic.



While education and communication technologies have played an important role in ensuring remote learning during lockdowns, the use of technology has not sufficiently substituted open schools and the support of teachers. The role of the teacher is expected to be more critical than ever, given that the education sector must mitigate the negative effects and aftermaths of the pandemic (Muñoz-Najar, et al. 2021).

The inequality gap between students is also illustrated by findings from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2020) which show that 32% of students from the highest income quintile had the opportunity to learn from educational TV programs, while 0% did so among the poorest quintiles.

In the four East African countries, learning via radio was a far more prominent solution for students (41%) than learning via televised education (6%) or the internet (5%). The use of paper-based learning material provided by the government was more common among the lower income percentile (26%) than in the higher income percentile (5%).

In West Africa, 62% of parents in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali identified the role of parents or older siblings as the most crucial factor to ensure learning, and to mitigate the lack of teachers during school lockdowns. On the other hand, 44% of respondents expressed that “no action” was taken by parents or the government to mitigate school closures. Given the impact of the crisis, households prioritised solving food and health problems over education.

An innovative delivery model for education programmes in Nepal

To respond to restrictions on group gatherings, SF developed an interactive radio program capturing the essence of the adolescent empowerment program “SAMVAD” (*dialogue* in Nepali) and secured government permission for broadcasting.

Through radio, the SAMVAD programme kept contact with adolescents (12,000 enrolled in early 2020) and their families during lockdowns, with a total outreach of 82,900 listeners and 79 aired episodes. 660 phone calls and 172 text messages were received as a result of the programme.

School closures and restrictions on group gatherings in Nepal affected all enrolled learners in SF’s programs. As an alternative to education, the government of Nepal and some schools introduced online distance learning, but nearly 70% of children and adolescents in SF’s areas of intervention had no access to the Internet, leaving many students even further behind.

To respond to this situation, SF adopted alternative means to disseminate information and generate dialogue with rural communities. SF educational programmes in Bangladesh compensated for the lack of alternative learning methods by prioritising and intensifying community activities through community facilitated children’s clubs, and structures established to mobilise and empower adolescents.



Dropout risk factors

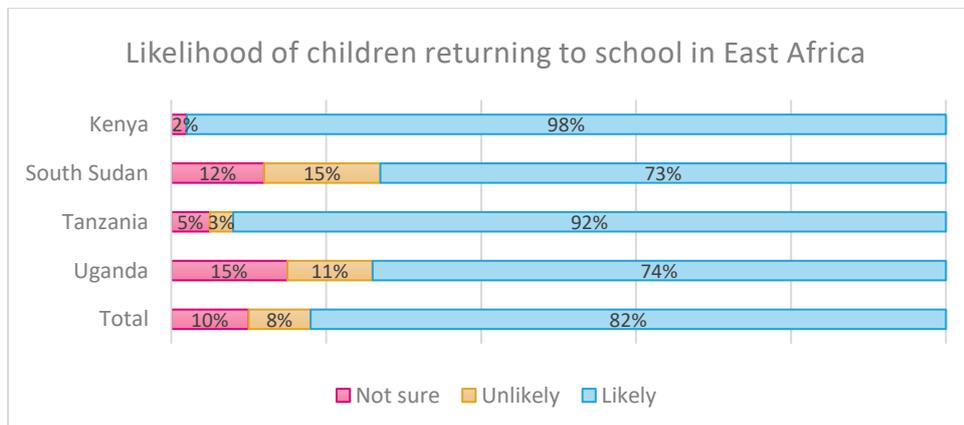
The risk of many children not returning to school after reopening is considerable. Substantial progress has been made over the past three decades to ensure girls’ right to education. UNICEF (2020) warns that these gains, particularly in enrolment and learning outcomes for girls, are at risk of being lost.

Moreover, school closures and restrictions on movement have put vulnerable children, girls, and women at a higher risk of violence, abuse, and other human rights violations. School closures have led to rising numbers of dropouts, affecting the poorest families. In Africa 2.6 million girls are at risk of not returning to school (World Bank, 2021c).

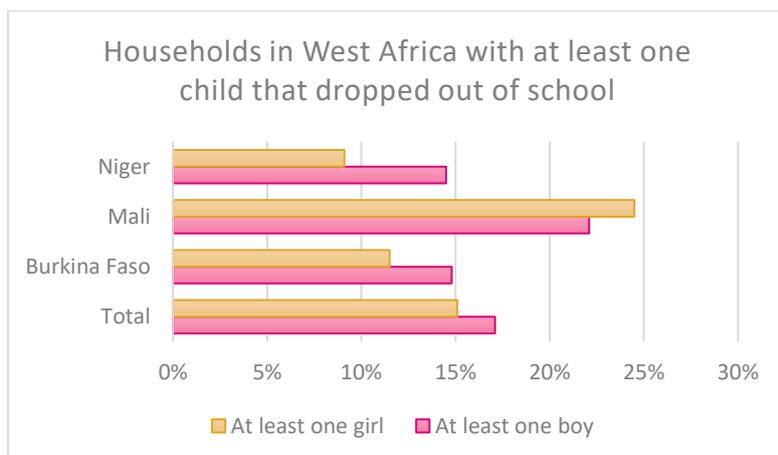
The situation described by UNESCO and UNICEF, is also reflected in SF’s data. For East Africa, the NNM suggest that as many as 1 in 5 caretakers regard it as “uncertain” or “unlikely” that their children will return to school after lockdowns are lifted.

Two important reasons stand out: first, pregnancies among older girls prevent them from returning to school. Recently, the Tanzanian government lifted the ban on pregnant girls attending school, hopefully lowering an important barrier to school attendance.

Secondly, as students outgrow their classes due to school closures, they may become reluctant to return to school and attend a lower grade, due to fear of stigma, if they are not automatically promoted to the next year. An increase in poverty and a decrease in food security may result in many children, not least girls from poor families, not returning to school. Reflecting this, the NNM found that 14% of girls from 6 to 12 years old in East Africa were child labourers during the early stage of school closures.



West Africa results show a similar trend in relation to school dropouts, even though national lockdowns had a shorter duration in the early stages of the pandemic. On average, one in six households had at least one child that dropped out of school due to the impacts of the pandemic. In Mali, one in four households had a child that dropped out of school. On average, results show that more boys than girls left school, suggesting that they dropped out to participate in labour activities.



At a time when the need and the role of teachers is more critical than ever (Muñoz-Najar, et al. 2021), one cause for concern is that teacher drop-out rates have risen during the pandemic. Many teachers in the private sector were not paid during lockdown. In Bangladesh, teacher stress increased (70% in private schools) due to salary non-payment and potential job loss. The deteriorating situation has led many teachers to leave the profession in search of work in other sectors.

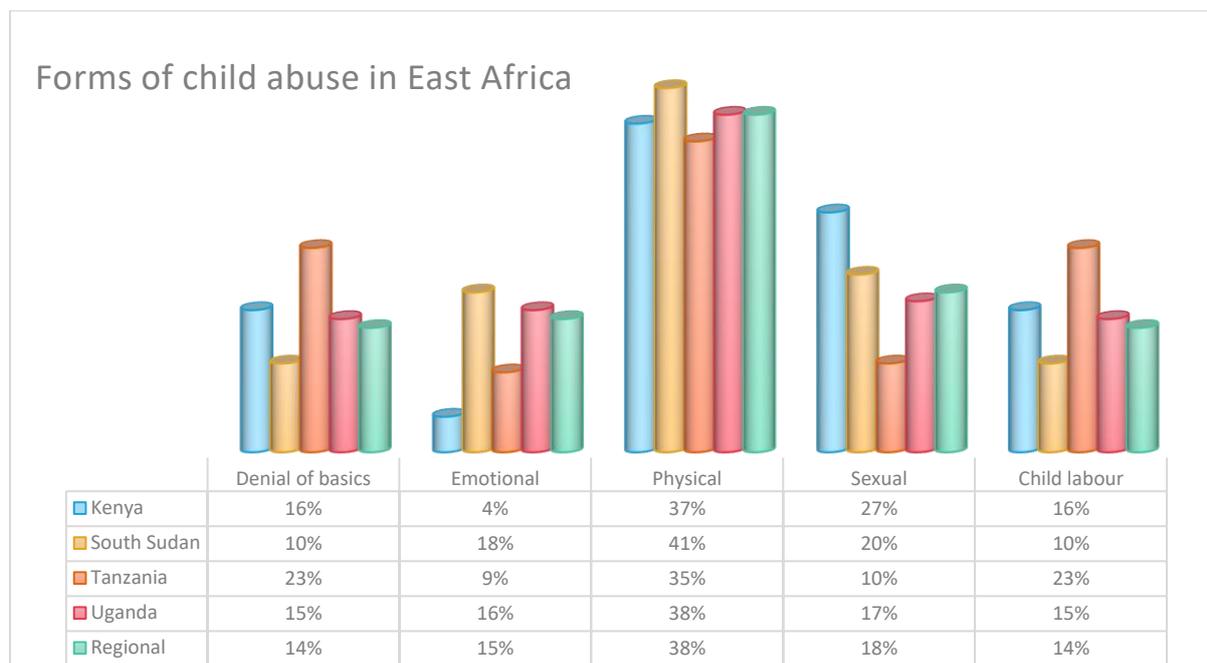
NNM assessments across West and East Africa seem to confirm this trend. Addressing the lack of teachers, training new ones, and strengthening school systems to fill learning gaps and reenrol students will require substantial attention from different stakeholders and investments to avoid a “lost generation” of learners around the world.

Violence and abuse towards children

The risk of abuse, violence and the infringement of rights has peaked during the pandemic, exacerbated by school closures and subsequent loss of transparency as children are confined at home, some of them with their abusers. The poorest and most vulnerable children are bearing the brunt of the Covid-19 crisis.

Many children are at risk of never returning to school; some are forced into child marriage or child labour. While child marriage had decreased 15% in the past decade, the profound effects of the pandemic are putting 10 million girls at a higher risk of early marriage due to a combination of income loss and school closures (UN, 2021). According to World Vision (2021), a child that goes hungry to bed has a 60% higher risk of being married away.

The most consistent theme referenced across SF’s areas of intervention is the escalation in cases of abuse of children and women during the pandemic. In East Africa, the NNM study found a high prevalence of sexual, physical, and other types of abuse among girls between the ages of 6 and 12. 18% of the girls reported having been subject to sexual abuse during the first six months of the pandemic. In 44% of these cases, the perpetrator was a family member. In Uganda, the helpline for children saw a fourfold increase in calls from 2019 to 2020 (Ahimbisibwe, 2021).



In the West African countries, 19% of children expressed being subject to, or knowing someone, that was the victim of violence or abuse during lockdowns and school closures. Girls were the most affected by violence as opposed to boys. The main types of abuse experienced by children was forced work, verbal abuse, and physical abuse. The home was the primary place where abuse took place.

Supporting recovery in the education sector

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that the focus of future initiatives is on Education for All. Successful delivery of universal quality education is essential to closing learning disparities among population groups. Governments must prioritise budget allocations and capital spending to improve school infrastructure, reinforce school staff, and guarantee facilities that keep children safe at school (UN, 2021). Well prepared and motivated teachers will play a critical role in supporting children when schools reopen, and countries seek to recover learning losses.

Urgent attention and collective action by all governments, stakeholders and communities is needed to ensure all children return to school. Key advocacy and campaign messages should be used to raise awareness on the importance of education. For example, SF Bangladesh has been an active member in the “Safe Back 2 School in Bangladesh” campaign, working together with civil society organisations mobilising together to promote the need for action and priorities in support of vulnerable children before, during and after schools reopened.

Besides education benefits, schools provide critical social protection resources for children and their families. Effective action against child rights violations must address the full range of vulnerabilities that children face and requires the implementation of policies and programmes that can contribute to the elimination of all kinds of child abuse through sustainable solutions to address its root causes. In addition, a greater focus on providing psychosocial support to children and adolescents should be considered.



The Children of the Pandemic

In Uganda, the closure of schools has led to many teenagers getting pregnant and having children. Every day, the danger that many children will never come back to school increases.



On a sofa under a picture of the virgin Mary and Jesus, a baby lies breathing heavily. The mother takes the baby boy up to her breast and wafts a fly away from his face. The child's mother, Resty Nakiwu, just turned 16 years old before she gave birth to Jeremiah. He is one of several thousand known as "pandemic children" in the country born to teenage girls. "When the schools closed, my life was turned upside down. I loved school and dreamt of getting an education, but then I got pregnant", says Resty and looks down at her son who is sleeping.

She was born and brought up in Mabombwe, a village outside Kampala, and was in 8th grade when the pandemic closed classrooms across the whole country on 20 March 2020.

15 million Ugandan children and teachers were sent home with immediate effect. The Ministry of Education began to explore various methods to help children with home schooling, amongst these via radio and TV. In May, packages containing learning materials were sent to children in all the country's primary, lower and upper secondary schools. The distribution took longer than expected, and many children never received the materials. The schools in Uganda have only opened individual forms, more than a year and a half after the pandemic broke out. Most of the primary and lower secondary school pupils are still at home. The plan is that a full reopening will start at the beginning of 2022.

"When the schools closed, I began to sell potato crisps to help my mother. They were long days spent at the market. That is where I met Jeremiah's father," says Resty, who has not seen him since she reported being pregnant. Teenage pregnancy has been a major public health issue in Uganda for years. According to statistics, in 2019 on average one in four girls between 15 and 19 years old got pregnant and gave birth to children. The pandemic has resulted in these figures increasing.

Rusty's mother Gertrude sits with her grandchild, little Jeremiah, in her lap. In one corner of the room is a sewing machine Resty got from her mother last year. For long, her daughter has held the dream that she will be able to make a living sewing and making her own clothes. Now the grandmother looks down at her grandchild, strokes his face, and looks over at her daughter.

"I love my daughter and my grandchild. And perhaps one day, when the boy is older, she will be able to achieve her dream of creating her own clothes and having her own brand. Who knows?" she wonders.

Photo and story by: Sofi Lundin



Section 3. Impact of Covid on Community resilience and civil society

‘Even before COVID-19, the world was not on track to achieve the SDG1 of ending poverty by 2030, and without immediate and significant action, it will remain beyond reach. The crisis has demonstrated more clearly than ever the importance of disaster preparedness and robust social protection systems’ (UN, 2021).

The presence of sustainable civil society structures that can empower communities to claim their rights and that help support communities and their members is central to building a strong and resilient society (Jezard, 2018).



After the initial shock of lockdowns, communities found innovative ways to provide mutual support, combat myths about the pandemic, and protect human rights. The COVID-19 pandemic accentuated the need for families and communities to strengthen their resilience to be able to care for themselves independently in the absence of external support.

As the pandemic began to unfold, the Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Self-Reliant Groups (SRGs) and CBOs created and supported by SF’s partners in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar took a lead role in advocating with authorities and bringing government services to the communities. In Sri Lanka, CBOs worked with local governments and other stakeholders to help secure relief items for over 17,000 families.

The CBOs took the initiative to compile the beneficiary list of vulnerable families and submitted it to stakeholders for action. Furthermore, CBO members realised the importance of community mechanisms. Small Groups and youth clubs came together to produce face masks and distribute awareness brochures and sanitation packs to 25,677 families.

NNM results from West Africa show clear links between belonging to mature and empowered community groups and the perceived resilience and safety of community members. Community action through organised groups and community-based organisations has played an important role in COVID-19 sensitisation and the prevention of rights violations.

For instance, adolescent forums in a district of Nepal prevented a high number of child marriages through advocacy and direct legal action during lockdowns.



“We have advocated at the level of the heads of districts and even the town hall to get involved in all activities to fight against COVID-19. We have organized reforestation and sanitation days in public places. We have contributed with money to buy hand washing kits, masks, and hand sanitiser to donate to markets, the health centre, and schools.”

“We also requested money from our partners to support our activities against the spread of COVID-19. At the start of the pandemic, some of us were invited to meetings with local authorities to discuss measures to change behaviours in the community. The president of our savings group participated in a radio program organized by the municipality to raise awareness about the disease.”

Extract from focus group discussions with female members of SF's savings groups in Djingareiber, municipality of Timbuktu, Mali.

There are also signs of challenges: in Nepal, Community Child Protection Committees were used to reporting child labour before the start of the pandemic. However, low levels of reporting during lockdowns likely meant that problems were not being addressed, highlighting the relative difficulty to setting up effective protection and whistleblowing mechanisms.

Similarly, in East Africa, savings groups and school management committees did not seem to have played a central role in terms of detecting abuse and ensuring protection for children.

There is substantial evidence on how civil society and community structures play a crucial role as “watchdogs”, safety nets and platforms for social action in a time of crisis, where public support is limited to providing the necessary services and social protection is lacking. However, the level of maturity and empowerment of these community groups matters when a crisis strikes.

Groups or community structures that were set up with a more technical core purpose as their objective (such as savings) seemed less likely to have a broader community impact during the pandemic than structures that were set up with empowerment, rights-foci and mobilisation as their core purposes such as Community Based Organisations (CBOs).

A shrinking space for civil society

Reports indicate that the functioning of civil society has been undermined during COVID-19, exacerbating community vulnerabilities and weaknesses particularly in fragile states such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and South Sudan (Relief Web, 2020). In these countries, the pandemic has been devastating, reversing economic progress to a degree that threatens national and regional security. Rights violations carried out by security forces have intensified, entrenching impunity and a lack of respect for law (UN, 2020a).



The International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL, 2021) raises concerns that civic rights such as freedom of assembly, association and free media are being infringed by governments, under the pretext of Covid-19. For instance, in Bangladesh there was a severe crackdown on free speech, the media and academic freedom during the pandemic with similar reports coming from Nepal, which also suffers from a weak legal framework for civil society.

**Community action during Covid-19:
Examples of how civil society
organisations took action to build
awareness and resilience**

Nepal: In Pyuthan, household visits were made by groups of 16 animators and young people to 17 settlements to sensitise communities regarding the prevention and spread of COVID-19. In the programme areas of ABC Nepal, 63 animators visited 189 households to sensitise them on the Covid-19 virus.

Bangladesh: Field facilitators, leaders and child club teachers provided 935 families with packages of protective equipment such as masks, soap, hand sanitiser, detergent, medicine in Jamalpur, Sherpur and Kurigram

SF's NNM study identified a reduction in lobbying and advocacy, public accountability and transparency at both national and local levels and evidence of increased corruption in Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and South Sudan. In Burkina Faso, the government did not allocate budget to support civil society during the crisis, and there have been difficulties raising resources at community level which has caused tensions between local authorities and community members.

Household and community resilience has been put under severe pressure during the pandemic, as the crisis in combination with unsustainable ways of coping has exhausted assets, leaving individuals, households, and communities less prepared for recurrent crises. It is therefore a paradox that one of the most important factors in ensuring sustainable and resilient communities – a strong and empowered civil society – has seen its space shrink at the hands of governments.



More child marriages halted

Amid the pandemic, local youth in Nepal mobilised to stop 24 child marriages in two villages



In April 2021, there were as many weddings as usual taking place in several villages in Nepal. But not all the girls getting married were of legal age.

Youth from SF's Samvad forum, a network of young people who have participated in SF's life skills programme Samvad ("dialogue" in Nepali), became aware of several cases in two villages and immediately acted.

They notified the local authorities and asked them to contact the police. The police visited the families in question, and 24 planned child marriages were immediately stopped, according to staff at SF's partner organisation, Sungabha Community Development (SCDC) in Nepal.

Child marriage is banned in Nepal, but it still takes place throughout the country, and to an increasing degree during the pandemic. Reporting cases of child marriage to local authorities has been an important part of the youth network's efforts. In 2018, one of the groups managed to help an entire village remain free of child marriage.

Young girls are particularly vulnerable when society is hit by recession and school closures. The pandemic has resulted, amongst other things, in an increase in child labour and marriages in Nepal and other places in the world. The World Bank (2020) has estimated that globally 13 million girls will be forced into early marriage by 2030.

"In the greater global context, stopping 24 child marriages is just a drop in the ocean, but it is really significant for those in question. This example illustrates that the work we had started before the pandemic was not in vain", says Titus Tenga, the International Director at SF.

An important objective of Samvad is that young girls and boys become "bosses in their own lives", contributing to raising awareness of their own rights - and those of others - including informing others about child marriage and preventing young people from becoming the victims of human trafficking, abuse, and exploitation.

The young people come together in small groups, and throughout the pandemic have participated in knowledge dissemination and information via local radio stations.

Photo: Øystein Venås Sørensen



Towards a Resilient Future

The social and economic scars from the COVID-19 pandemic will remain long after recovery. A key concern is that millions of vulnerable households have been left less resilient to recurrent crises and shocks. Substantial gains to eradicate global poverty have been lost or delayed over the past two years. To recover from the pandemic and to get back on track in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals will require long term strategies with a strong focus on reinforcing local community resilience.

In the short term, the most critical need in many communities is food. Hunger and malnutrition are real and acute issues. Hunger, in turn, triggers unsustainable coping strategies that leave communities increasingly vulnerable in relation to a range of socioeconomic factors, including the accumulation of household assets, the ability to generate future income, the ability to uphold children's and women's rights, and access to education. Distribution of food both through traditional humanitarian channels, as well as civil society/international NGO programmes should be prioritised. Effective improvement of short-term food security will require strengthened collaboration and partnerships between humanitarian, development, and government actors.

In the long term, food security and the eradication of hunger and malnutrition is a vital factor in ensuring the achievement of the SDGs. Communities and households with access to their own food production or to effective food supply chains, will be more likely to boost their resilience with adequate support. Reinforcing efforts to enhance sustainable and climate-adapted agriculture, food supply chains and local food production will be essential in restoring communities' long-term resilience.

The pandemic has triggered an education crisis and a real risk of a "lost generation" of learners. Learning gaps are dramatic, along with increased risks of long-term or permanent dropout from school. Higher child abuse rates and an increase in early pregnancies and child marriages have heightened the barriers to enrolling or returning to school, especially for girls. The situation is exacerbated by a loss of teachers in a context where education systems are facing unprecedented challenges to ensure that children and adolescents' complete school, that the learning deficit is recovered, and that schools provide a safe return to classes.

Preparing teachers and schools for the coming wave of enrolled students, many of which have substantial gaps in learning, will require targeted investments in the coming months and years. Investments must include teacher recruitment and training, as well as improving basic school infrastructure. Psychosocial support should also be integrated in the capacity building of teachers and school curricula. Effective campaigns and programmes addressing the growing numbers of out-of-school children will be even more essential than before the pandemic.

There is still a lot to learn in terms of the effectiveness of alternative teaching and learning methods. Further studies and pilots should be developed to inform education systems, so countries are better prepared for future scenarios where school closures are required.

The pandemic has highlighted the need to work holistically to ensure progress towards the achievement of the SDGs within the context of a global crisis. Approaches that focus on the enhancement of resilience and disaster preparedness are necessary for SDG progress and to avoid substantial setbacks in the event of local, national, or global crises.



In the short term, hybrid humanitarian/development approaches must be considered, particularly to address the immediate economic effects and impacts caused by the pandemic. Longer term, holistic development approaches, preferably applied through DRR approaches will be essential as development actors and governments design strategies for the future. DRR and holistic approaches require strong partnerships to achieve the SDGs. This would require the establishment of consortiums and cross-disciplinary collaborations, bringing together actors of complementary competence, including the private sector.

Finally, a strong civil society and empowered local community structures play a key role in contributing to resilience. To empower civil society through rights-based approaches can accelerate development and allow vulnerable households and communities to build a better livelihood for themselves post Covid-19.

Brief description of the methodology

The New Normal Mapping was concluded in May 2021, including household surveys and surveys among children/youth, with a total sample of 5,436 respondents, equally distributed between SF's countries of intervention in East and West Africa. The mapping utilised a mixed methods approach of quantitative surveys, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and a review of secondary data.

The quantitative data was collected using digital survey tools, and independent consultants were employed for analysis purposes and to support SF in writing the reports. Separate reports were written for East and West Africa. This document summarises the findings and analysis from the regional reports and integrates additional and updated secondary sources.

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