

Context

To date, COVID-19 has had far-reaching economic impacts, producing the deepest global recession in decades, with impacts on employment, earnings, production, and trade (1). In April 2020, nearly a third of the global population was on lockdown, limiting the ability to work and engage in commerce (2).

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Highlights



COVID-19 has hit households' finances significantly. 40% claim minor to major reductions in income across the five countries. The causes are varied; 38% of respondents report they are unable to go out to make a living, while others report that they are working less (18%), or that their business or farm has been negatively affected (15%). Another 19% report that they have lost their jobs.



The food security situation is alarming. 27% of the population surveyed had to reduce portion sizes and 22% had to skip meals more than once in the last 7 days. This points to nearly a quarter of households surveyed struggling to meet the most basic needs - and likely pointing to negative consequences in terms of health, education and well-being.



Access to basic supplies such as food and soap is a serious issue. 53% of households report challenges. The main causes appear to be elevated item prices (44%) and item availability (35%), as opposed to an inability to get to the market (10%) or fear of contagion (12%).



The potential impact of lost income is considerable. 32% of respondents indicated that if they were to lose all income they would only have the ability to pay for essentials like food and rent for less than one week. Another 34% indicated that they have less than one month of savings to fall back on. This has important implications for how long a lock-down can be sustained.



The majority of households do not have savings for emergencies. 63% indicate that they do not have savings, further revealing the treacherous position faced by households during the pandemic.

3-2-1 COVID-19 Survey

Viamo, as part of our COVID-19 response, added COVID-19 information on our 3-2-1 Service in 18 countries, including messages on symptoms and prevention.

As of July 1 2020, these key messages have been listened to 25 million times by more than 3.3 million users. To further understand the information gaps and needs of our users, we added the 3-2-1 Service COVID-19 survey to poll our users about their knowledge of the disease, as well as the impact of the disease on their livelihood. To keep the IVR survey short, 12 different questionnaires were used, each addressing a specific COVID-related topic area (knowledge of COVID awareness and how to prevent it; attitudes; preventive behaviors; motivation, impact on food security, income, mental health, etc.).

The surveys were implemented in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Madagascar, Malawi, and Rwanda. The first wave of the 3-2-1 COVID-19 surveys, conducted in May 2020 and involving over 1,500 respondents for each of the 12 questionnaires, demonstrated the value of the 3-2-1 Service for providing rapid, reliable, low-cost data on country experiences during the pandemic. We present here key findings from Wave 1 of the 3-2-1 COVID-19 survey as repeated cross-sectional, monthly data continues to be collected. These findings may be of interest to officials, planners, and policy-makers currently addressing the pandemic at all levels of the response.

Fig 1: Percentage distribution of respondents changes in household income as a result of COVID-19

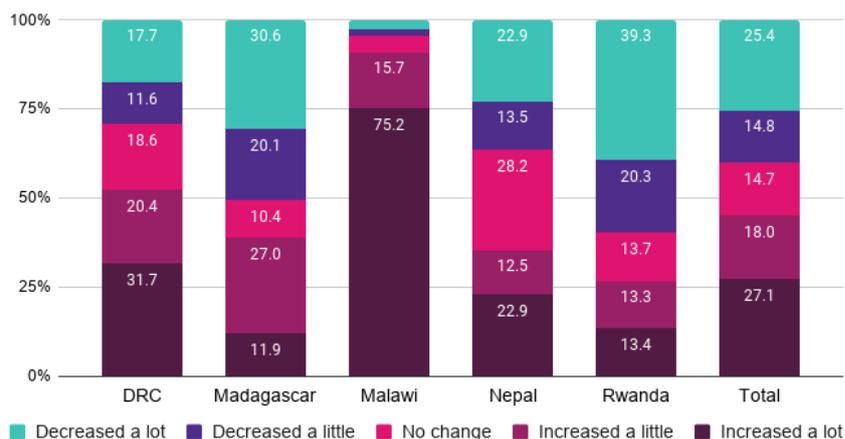


Fig. 1. The data reveal a perilous situation for many, with substantial proportions of respondents reporting decreased income as a result of COVID-19. In Rwanda, 39.3% of households reported that their income had decreased a lot, and 20.3% of respondents said that their income decreased a little. Other countries have fared only slightly better; the percentage of respondents for whom income has decreased a lot was 17.7% in the DRC, 22.9% in Nepal, and 30.6% in Madagascar. In Malawi, where there was no lockdown or restriction of movement, trade, or commerce, and where it is harvest season, we see the opposite result. Since many users of the 3-2-1 Service are farmers, they are experiencing seasonal increase in income due to crop sales that are unrelated to COVID-19. Respondents may have misunderstood that the question was in reference to coronavirus and were simply reporting their seasonal increase in income.

Fig 2: Percentage distribution of respondents main reason for decrease in income

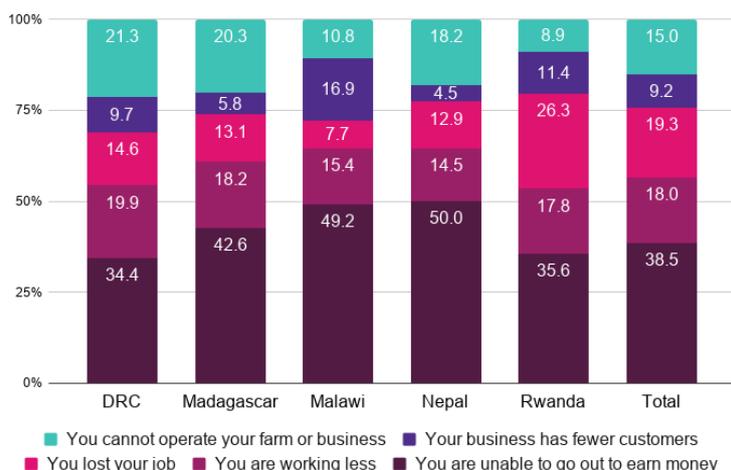


Fig. 2. The reasons for loss of income are varied with the lockdown policies being the leading explanation with 34% of respondents reporting they are unable to go out to earn a living. Business operations, restricted work hours, loss of customers and loss of job come in at 16% each. In both Malawi and Nepal, nearly half of respondents reported that the main reason for their income loss is that they are unable to go out to earn money but actual loss of job was lower than many of the other countries. Job loss as a main cause of lost income varied from 7.7% of respondents in Malawi to 26.3% of respondents in Rwanda. In the DRC and Madagascar, roughly one in five said that the main reason for their income loss is that they are unable to work on their farm or operate their business. In each country, 15-20% of respondents said that they have less income because they are working less.



15-20%

of respondents said that they have less income because they are working less

Fig. 3. This graph paints a dire situation: 27.1% of the population had to limit portion sizes at least a few times in the last 7 days, with 16.6% doing so every meal, due in part to lack of money and also perhaps to inability to get staples. In Rwanda, only 32.1% of respondents reported that they were eating the same amount as normal and even in Madagascar, where the decline is the smallest, only 46.6% of respondents say that they are eating the same amount of food as usual.

Fig 3: Percentage distribution of respondents reporting that they or someone in their household has had to limit portion size at meal times due to a lack of food or money

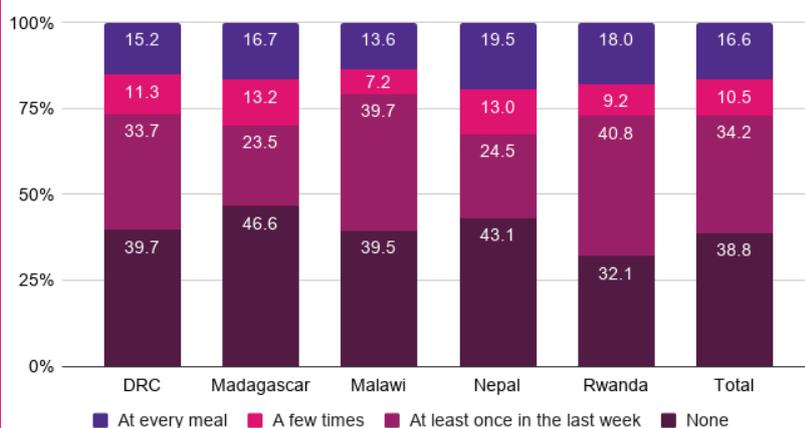
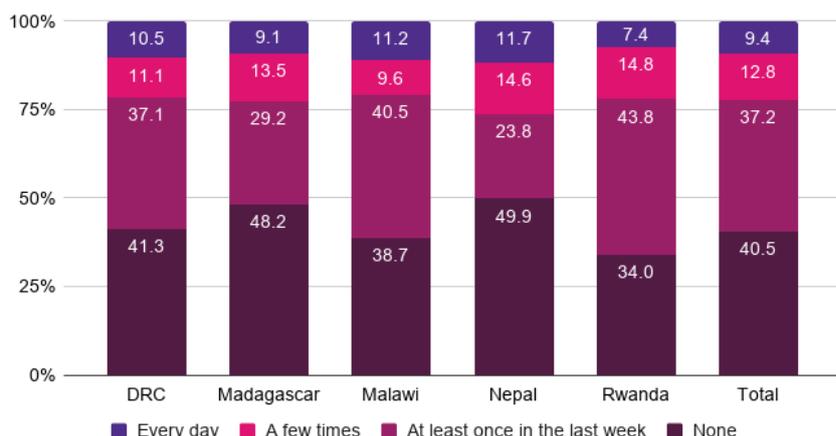


Fig 4: Percentage distribution of respondents reporting that they or someone in their household has had to reduce the number of meals in a day due to a lack of food or money



Likewise, Fig. 4 paints an alarming picture with 22.3% of the households in all countries having had to skip meals in the last week due to lack of food or money, 9.4% of which are having to do so every day.



22.3%

of households reported having had to skip meals in the last week due to lack of food or money

Fig 5: Percentage of respondents experiencing difficulties obtaining essential products (soap, food)

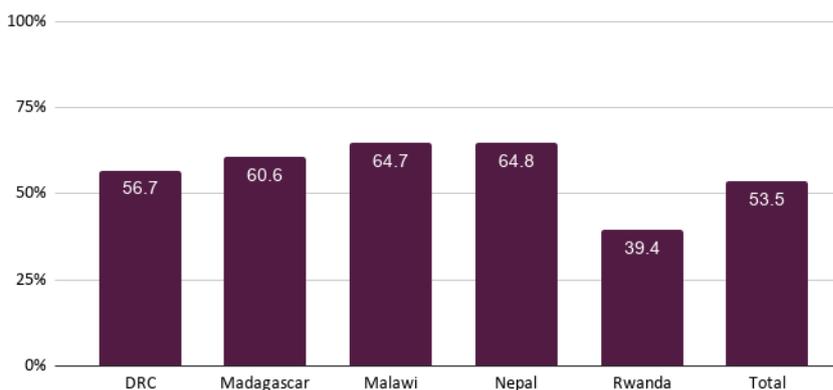


Fig. 5. Access to basic goods like soap and food is a serious challenge in the surveyed populations with 53.5% of households reporting difficulty accessing these basics, ranging from a low of 39.4% of respondents in Rwanda to approximately 65% of respondents in Malawi and Nepal.



53.5%

of households reported difficulty accessing basic goods

Fig 6: Percentage distribution of respondents main reason for difficulties obtaining specific products

Fig. 6. The main causes for having difficulties accessing basic products (food, soap) appear to be the price of these products and the availability of these products in stores and at markets.

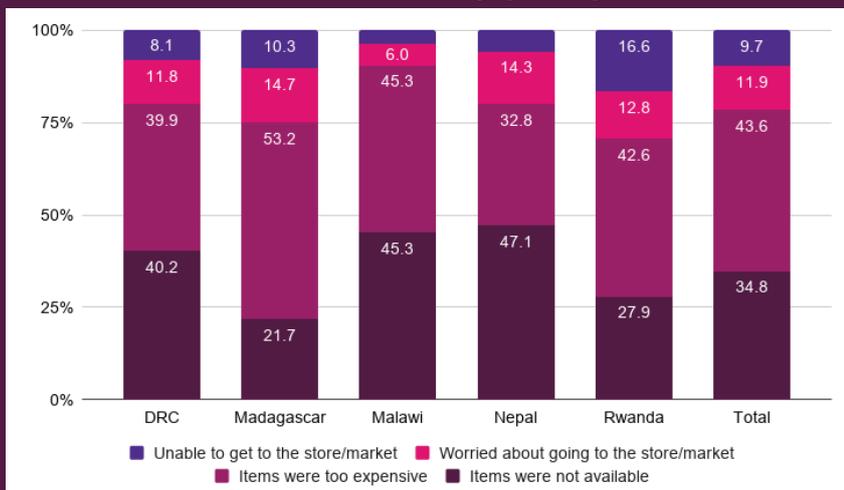


Fig 7: Percentage of respondents that have spent money on COVID-19 prevention

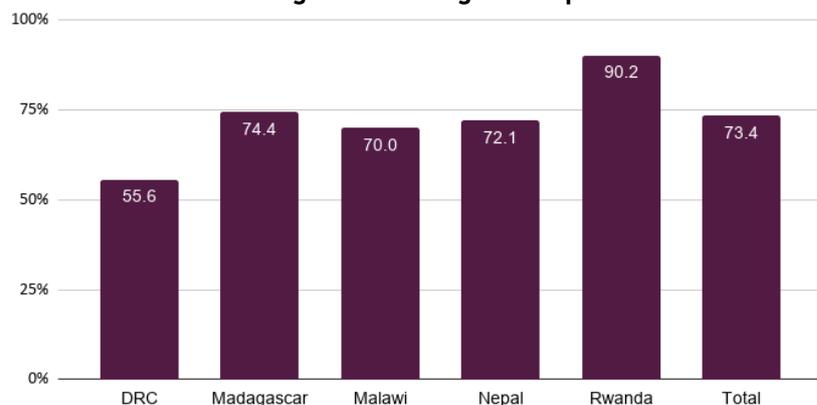


Fig. 7. In all countries, the majority of households have spent money on coronavirus prevention such as soap, sanitizer, masks and other prevention tools. While 70–90% of respondents report such expenditures, just over half of households in the DRC have made similar purchases.



Methodology

The survey is administered to 3-2-1 Service callers as 12 topical mini-surveys, each with 4-7 questions. 3-2-1 Service callers are invited to participate in a short survey. Those callers who consent to participate are randomly assigned to one of the 12 questionnaires. All questions are multiple choice using Interactive Voice Response (IVR), in local languages. Demographic information (gender, age group, location) was voluntarily provided on this or previous calls. Each wave was run until 1,000-1,500 completed responses per survey. Round 1 data was collected between May 4 and June 8, 2020. Compared to Random Digit Dial mobile surveys, 3-2-1 Service users are younger, slightly poorer, and more likely to get their information through their mobile phones.

References

- (1) World Bank. 2020. "The Global Economic Outlook During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Changed World," June 8, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/08/the-global-economic-outlook-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-changed-world>, Accessed June 23, 2020.
- (2) McFall-Johnsen, Juliana Kaplan, Lauren Frias, Morgan (14 March 2020). "A third of the global population is on coronavirus lockdown — here's our constantly updated list of countries and restrictions". Business Insider Australia. Retrieved 15 April 2020.

Suggested Citation

Hutchinson, Paul, Leah Newman, and Dominique Meekers. 2020. "Key findings of the 3-2-1 Service COVID-19 Surveys: Food security and economic impact (Wave 1)". Washington, DC: Viamo.