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RECOVR Roundup Vol. 11: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

In this eleventh installment of our RECOVR Roundup series, we are sharing new findings and analysis from the [RECOVR Research Hub](#) and from our partner organizations, as well as links on what is happening in the Social Protection landscape in response to COVID-19. Read the [previous installment](#) if you missed it, and [sign up for our mailing list](#) if you'd like to receive this roundup series directly to your inbox.

As always, we encourage you to [write to our team](#) with ideas for features.

New Findings & Analysis

Kenya: What can financial health diaries tell us about coping with income losses during the pandemic?

Despite income losses, households were able to largely maintain food expenditures by cutting back on and shifting other spending

Researchers [Wendy Janssens](#), [Menno Pradhan](#), [Richard de Groot](#), [Estelle Sidze](#), [Hermann Donfouet](#), and [Amanuel Abajobir](#) with the Amsterdam Institute for Global Health and Development [sought to get a close look](#) at how low-income households in rural Kenya coped with the immediate economic consequences of the pandemic. They used weekly interviews and detailed transaction data from six weeks before Kenya recorded a case, to five weeks after various containment measures were implemented. **Income from work decreased by almost one-third and income from gifts and remittances decreased by more than one-third after the start of the pandemic. Nevertheless, household expenditures on food remained at pre-COVID levels.** Rather than households coping through increased borrowing, selling assets or withdrawing savings, they instead gave out fewer gifts and remittances, lent less money to others, and postponed loan repayments.

Uganda: Dispatch from the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement during COVID-19

Over time, cash transfers helped to mitigate, but not eliminate, food insecurity

Emma Kimani, Heather Lanthorn, Daniel Stein, and Rico Bergemann of IDinsight have been tracking the well-being of a sample of refugees in the Kiryandongo refugee settlement in Uganda. The final of three updates on their work—which tracks a group who received US\$1,000 cash transfers in 2020, compared to a comparison group who will receive transfers in 2021—is out. They find that perceived likelihood of contracting COVID-19 and (self-reported) mask-wearing have stayed the same over time, while recognition of asymptomatic transmission and self-reported social distancing dropped over the several months of the study. As far as food security goes, **households that received cash transfers reported being more food secure than comparison households. However, in both groups, most households said they had cut down the size of meals or skipped meals in the last seven days.** Compared to a year earlier, refugees reported that inter-refugee and refugee-host relations have improved, though most refugees also said that they were overcharged for goods in markets run by Ugandans.

What We're Reading & Watching

- Twitter founder Jack Dorsey is auctioning off his first-ever tweet to charity (using a blockchain-tracked 'non-fungible token'), and **donating the proceeds (currently going rate is \$2.5 million) to GiveDirectly's Africa COVID-19 Response Fund.**
- *The Economist* proposes principles for social safety nets in the post-pandemic world, including **digitizing outdated bureaucracies and basing assistance on “active labor market policies”** that help people get back to work faster after shocks and crises.
- Two interesting new papers examine **India's response to the pandemic**, with one noting that almost all its new cash transfer programs were based on temporary executive decisions rather than permanent legislation, and another finding that regions which have historically stronger track records at implementing the MGNREGA cash-for-work program did better at protecting people's incomes during the pandemic.
- How can we **expand access to social protection in urban areas?** A new World Bank paper from Gentilini, Khosla & Almenfi points out that with urban populations in Africa growing by 90,000 people a day, the face of poverty will also become urbanized, and social safety nets designed for rural populations will have to be rethought. They explore how to do this with case studies from 11 African cities.
- The US Congress passed the groundbreaking \$1.9 trillion American Recovery Act, part of which provides for \$300 monthly checks to eligible families with children for one year, potentially **cutting childhood poverty rates by up to 45%.**

- In celebration of **International Women’s Day**, IPA highlighted seven leading women policymakers working to promote social policy, education, and fight gender-based violence through data and evidence-based decisions.
- ... and as gender inequality worsens in many countries because of the pandemic, it is critical to **have a gender lens when developing relief policies**—for example, by targeting households headed by women for relief measures.

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