COVID-19: Impact on households well being monitoring

From May to June, 2021

The Gambia

Newsletter No 6. --August 2021

KEY MESSAGES

One in ten households could not recognize at least one symptom of COVID-19. Fever and coughing are the most cited symptoms. Information about COVID-19 is mostly accessed through radio (74%), television (56%); and friends/neighbors (41%).

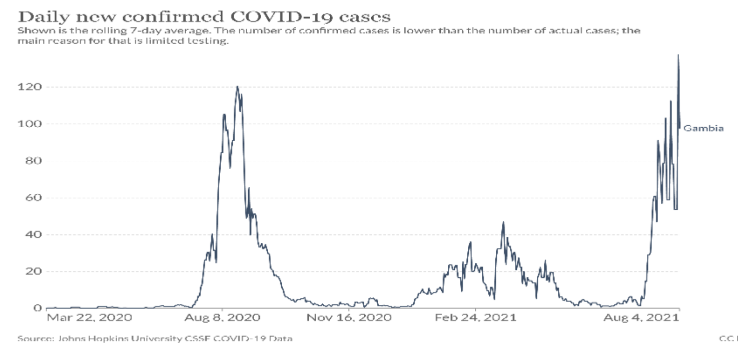
Although food security of households has improved between October 2020 and June 2021, rising food prices remains a concern for over 90% of households. Most of these households use either no or negative coping strategies.

Labor market conditions appear to be deteriorating as job losses and declines in income increase- particularly among the poorest and rural households. However, these changes appear to be largely driven by seasonality or work.

Overall, only 16% and 12% of households have migrants who have returned home from within The Gambia and abroad respectively. The reasons for returning are more likely to be personal than COVID related.

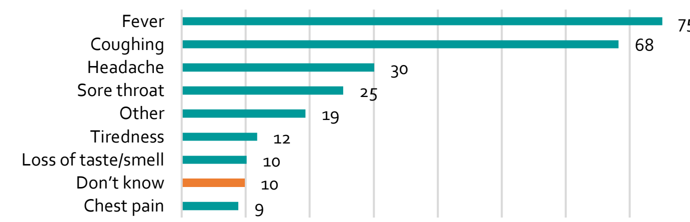
METHODOLOGY

The results in this note were prepared using data from the wave 6 of the High Frequency Survey on the COVID-19 Impacts on Households in The Gambia. A sub-sample of 1279 households of the Labor Force Survey (LFS) were interviewed by phone between May 18th. and June 3rd. 2021. These same households have already been interviewed during the previous 5 waves. The data collection period corresponded to the period of calm that followed the second wave of the epidemic. The results are representative at the national level and at strata level (Banjul- the capital city; and Kanifing also an urban settlement around the capital city; other urban areas, and rural areas)



COVID-19 UPDATE

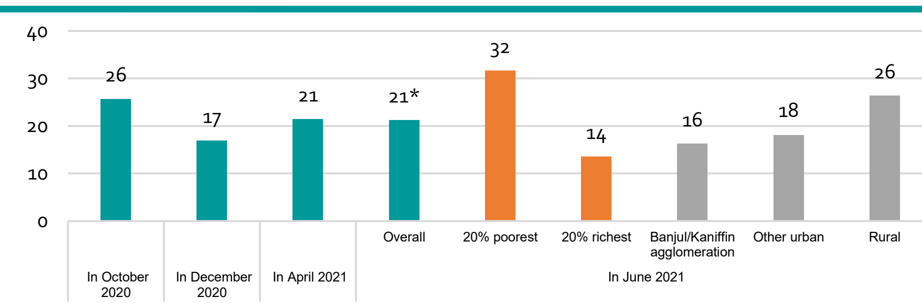
- As of June 2021, one in ten households could not recognize at least one symptom of covid-19. Of the households that could, fever and coughing were the most known (respectively 75% and 68%). Tiredness, loss of taste and smell, and chest pain appeared to be less commonly known (only near 10% of respondents listed each). Households receive information about covid-19 mainly through radio (74% of households), especially in rural areas, and television (56%). The relay of information through the network of friends and neighbors also plays a significant role (41%).



Graph 1: Understanding of covid-19 symptoms (%)

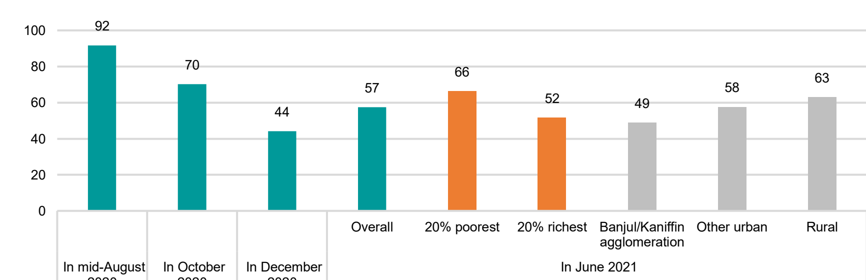
EMPLOYMENT

- Job losses (defined as individuals who were working before the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, but subsequently stopped working) declined between August and December 2020 from 26% to 17%; but increased slightly to 21% in April and June 2021. Job losses are higher among the poorest households (32%) and in rural areas (26%). This is possibly due to the seasonality of agriculture which is the main source of livelihood in rural Gambia- where also majority of the poor live. The sensitivity of the labor market to seasonality is further illustrated in the reasons for stopping work- seasonality and temporary stoppage of work, is cited by 51% and 22% of households who are no longer working respectively. The reasons for stopping work that are potentially related to covid-19 (closure of activities, reduction of personnel due to a drop in activity) have declined significantly- from about 30% in August 2020 to about 9% in June 2021.
- The share of households who reported a decline in income increased from 44% in December 2020 to 57% in June 2021. This jump follows a period of declining share of households experiencing income loss- from 92% in August 2020; to 70% in October 2020; and 44% in December 2020. Similar to job losses, income loss is most common among the poorest and rural households. The pattern of income decline is similar to the patterns of individuals out of work and could therefore be for a lot a result of the seasonality of agricultural work.



In June 2021, the employment section was administered to all members over 7years instead of only heads.

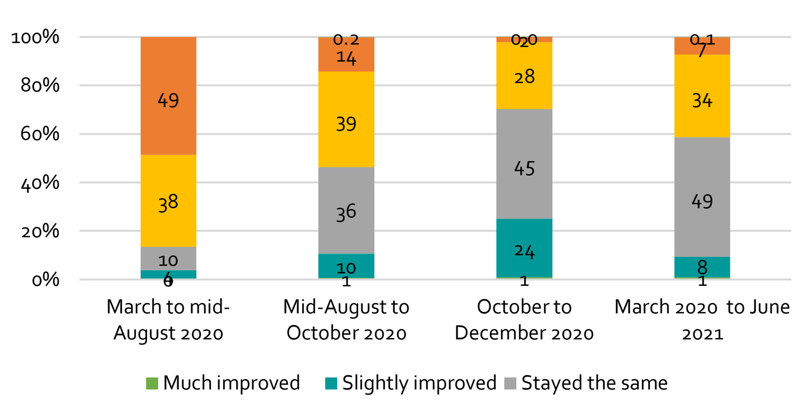
Graph 2: People working before March 2020 but not working in October, December 2020, April 2021, then June 2021 (%)



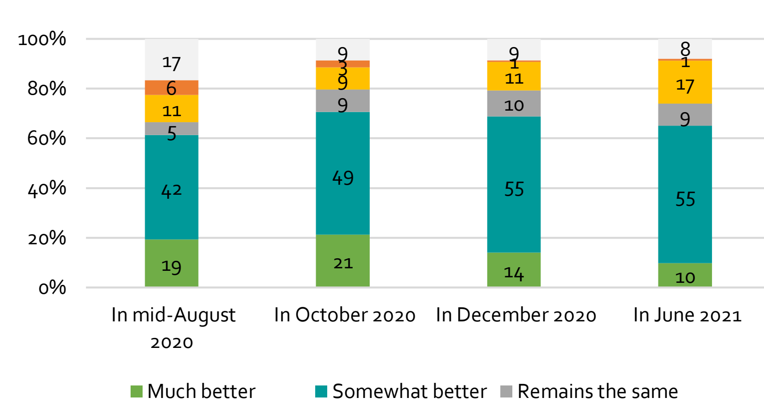
Graph 3: Household Income Decline since March 2020 (%)

WELL-BEING & FOOD SECURITY

- Households' perception of their wellbeing appears to be deteriorating. The share of households who reported worsening state of wellbeing increased from 28% in October-December 2020 to 34% in March-June 2021. Similarly, the share of households who reported improved state of wellbeing declined from 24% to 8% during the same period. However, households remain optimistic in their perception of future wellbeing with more than half (55%) anticipating an improvement in wellbeing in the next 12 months.

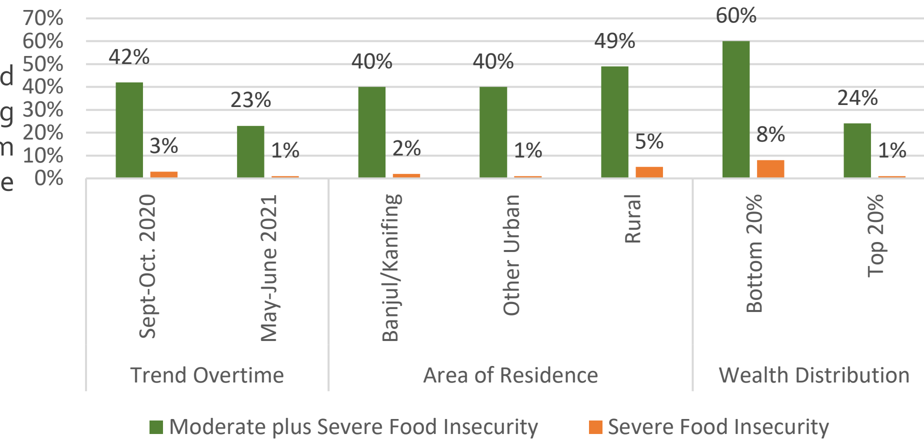


Graph 4: Perception of household wellbeing from March to June 2021



Graph 5: Subjective forecast of the evolution of household wellbeing

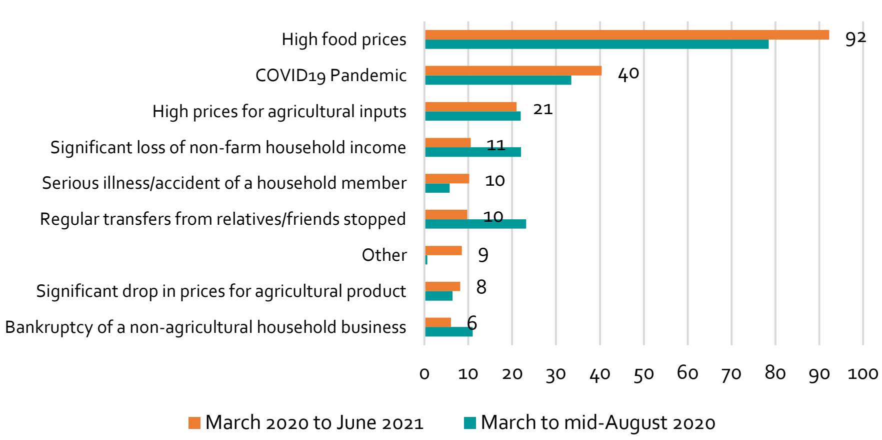
- Food security of households has largely improved between October 2020 and June 2021. Moderate and severe food insecurity half almost halved during this period- from 42% to 23%; whereas severe food insecurity declined from 3% to 1%. Food insecurity remains higher in rural areas (49%) and among the poorest households (60%).



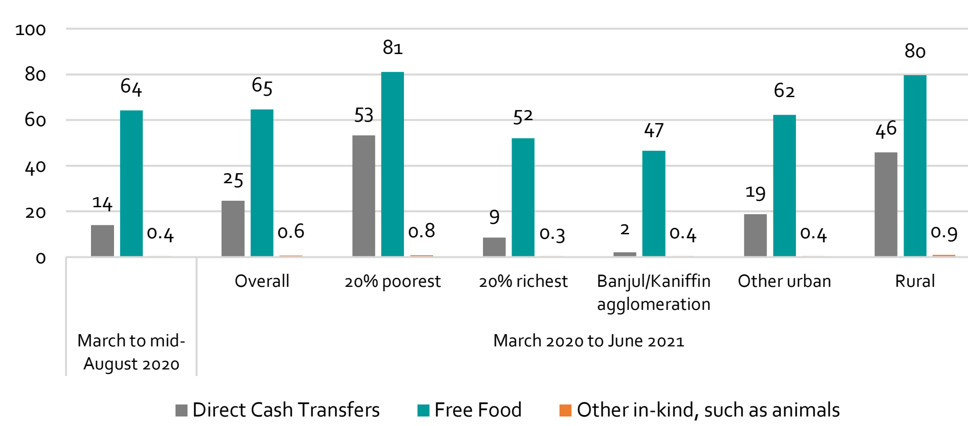
Graph 6: Food Insecurity Experienced Scale (%)

SHOCKS & SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

- The structure of shocks experienced by households since the start of the pandemic has changed little between August 2020 and June 2021. Rising food prices remains the most important shock affecting households, with figures rising from 78% to 92% between August 2020 and June 2021. Among households faced with rising prices, 14% have no coping strategy leaving them most vulnerable. Commonly used coping-strategies include: consumption of cheaper foodstuffs (28%), the reduction of consumption level (26%) and, to a lesser extent, to their savings (15%). The crisis of covid-19 also remains a major shock affecting households- one third of households in August 2020 and 40% in June 2021. To mitigate the effects of the pandemic, households are resorting to dipping into their savings, using assistance from friends and the government, or by reducing their consumption.
- Since the onset of the covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the share of households receiving any type of assistance, whether financial, food, or other, has been stable - from 66% in August 2020 to 67% in June 2021. However, an increase in households receiving financial assistance from 14% to 27% is observed during this period. While food aid is relatively accessible to all income groups and all households regardless of their area of residence, financial assistance is much more targeted to the poorest households and those in rural areas. The main provider of social assistance remains the government – 90%.



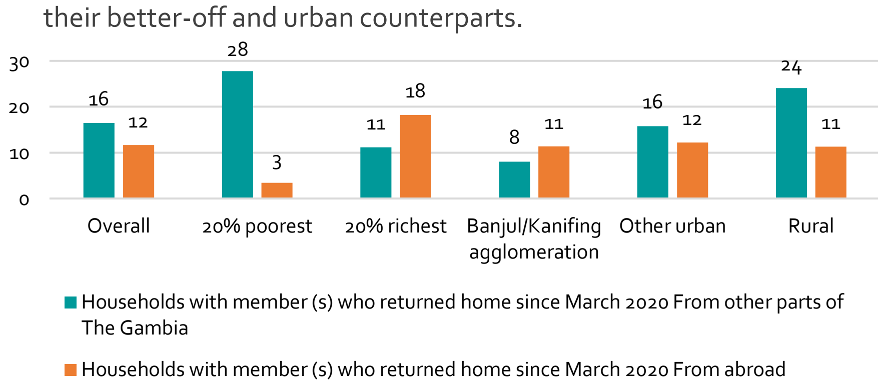
Graph 7: Shocks negatively affected household since March 2020 (%)



Graph 8: Assistance received by households since March 2020

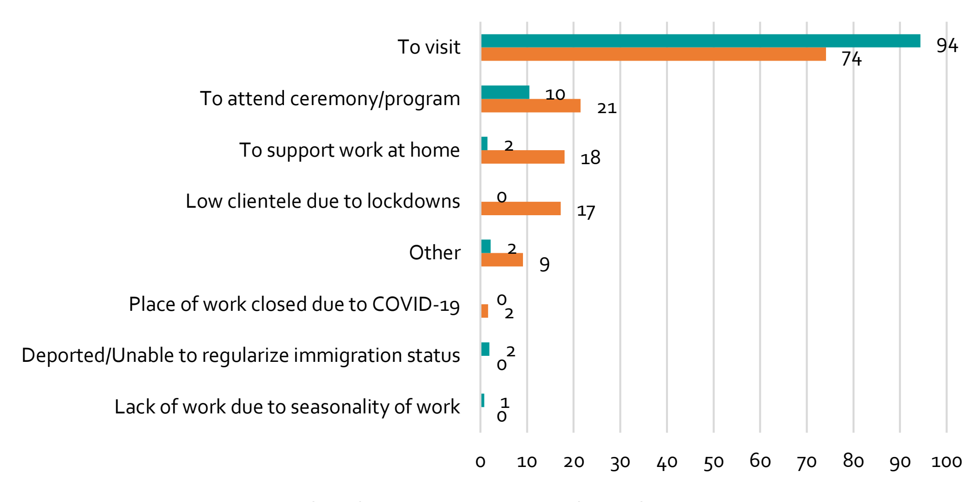
MIGRATION PATTERNS SINCE MARCH 2020

- Slightly more than one in five households (22%) have a member working temporarily in another region in The Gambia (6%) or abroad (16%). The poorest households and those in rural areas have more internal economic migrants, while the better-off households are more likely to be composed of international economic migrants. Since March 2020, in 16% and 12% of households of internal and international migrants respectively, the migrants have returned to their families of origin. Returnees are the main income providers for nearly 42% of their households of origin. Poor and rural households are particularly affected by the return of their local migrants, although they are much less dependent on their migrants than their better-off and urban counterparts.



Graph 9: Households with member(s) working temporarily in other parts of the country or abroad who returned home since March 2020 (%)

- Overall, few returns, whether from within The Gambia or from abroad, appear to be motivated by covid-19-related reasons. The number of international migrants returning because of decline in their clientele following curfews and confinements appears to be significant (17 percent). Most returnees are motivated by personal reasons (visits, ceremonies, family support).



Graph 10: Perception of government actions during the pandemic (%)

The bottom 20% or poorest households; and top 20% or richest households; are identified based on an asset index type of wealth distribution.

For further details, visit https://www.gbosdata.org
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