

The Covid-19 Crisis and People's Right to Food

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Abstract

India's national lockdown in 2020, in response to the Covid-19 crisis, was one of the harshest in the world. Multiple household surveys indicate that the lockdown and the economic recession that followed led to a severe nutrition crisis. Food deprivation was most intense during the national lockdown but continued throughout the year. Relief measures helped, but they compensated for just a fraction of people's income losses, even among poor households. It is doubtful that employment, income and nutrition among informal-sector workers and their families ever regained their pre-lockdown levels before a second wave of the Covid-19 epidemic hit the country in early 2021. The Indian government's failure to put in place more effective relief measures is a serious denial of people's right to food. With relief measures off the table in 2021, at the time of writing, there is a serious danger of another wave of intense food deprivation.

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Introduction

Twenty years have passed since the right to food entered India's public discourse in a sustained manner. This right can be seen as an aspect of the fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. The right to food also derives from the Directive Principles, in particular Article 47, which clearly states that "[t]he State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties". This must be read in conjunction with Article 37, which asserts that the Directive Principles are "fundamental to the governance of the country" and that "it shall be the duty of the state to apply these principles in making laws" (Drèze 2004).

It is in this spirit that legal safeguards for the right to food, or at least aspects of the right to food, were sought from the Supreme Court as well as from the Indian Parliament during the last twenty years. This led, over time, to a series of orders and laws such as the Supreme Court order on school meals (28 November 2001), a follow-up order on the Integrated Child Development Services (13 December 2006), and of course the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. The latter covers not only midday meals and ICDS but also the public distribution system (PDS) and maternity entitlements.

The reframing of food and nutrition issues in a rights framework has also helped to mobilise a wide range of institutions and individuals around these issues. When people have a right to something, it makes it easier for them to demand it. That is why so many people today are standing up, individually or collectively, to claim nutrition-related entitlements such as school meals, food rations and maternity benefits, for themselves or for others.

In spite of these initiatives, undernutrition levels in India are still among the highest in the world. Significant progress occurred (for the first time) between the third and fourth rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), i.e. between 2005-6 and 2015-16. However, partial findings of the fifth round, released a few months ago, suggest no further progress between 2015-16 and 2019-20 – just before the Covid-19 crisis. As it happens, this period began with the demonetisation blunder and severe budget cuts for child nutrition programmes. Based on the complete fourth-round NFHS findings, the proportion of underweight children was as high as 36% in India in 2015-16, as against 22% in Bangladesh (2018) and 27% in Nepal (2016) based on comparable surveys. According to the *World Development Indicators*, only two or three countries such as Niger and Yemen have a higher proportion of underweight children.

The 2020 Crisis

It is against this background that India was hit by the Covid-19 crisis in early 2020. The prolonged national lockdown that began in late March threw millions of people out of work and sharply reduced earnings for those who remained employed in some fashion. With the collapse of purchasing power and continued restrictions in many areas, the economic crisis continued well after the national lockdown. In addition, there was a severe disruption of public services including nutrition-related services: midday meals, in particular, were discontinued as anganwadis and schools were closed in most states for the best of 2020. The provision of non-Covid health services also declined sharply during and after the lockdown: according to the official Health Management Information System (HMIS), April-May 2020 coverage as a proportion of April-May 2019 coverage was only 80% for ante-natal care, 74% for child immunization and 53% for outpatient attendance, with much lower figures in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (Drèze and Paikra 2020).

These setbacks were only partly compensated by relief measures. Foodgrain rations under the PDS were more or less doubled from April to November 2020; employment generation under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) expanded by nearly 50% compared with the previous year; and some cash transfers were also made, e.g. to old-age pensioners and women's Jan Dhan Yojana (JDY) accounts. Some state governments supplemented this national package with relief measures of their own (Khera and Malhotra forthcoming). For most households, however, these transfers were just a fraction of what they had lost due to the lockdown and ensuing economic crisis.

Official statistics and macroeconomic aggregates do not shed much light on this livelihood crisis. As it happens, however, a large number of household surveys were conducted by independent research institutions and civil society organisations in 2020. A valuable compilation of these surveys is [available](#) on the website of the Centre for Sustainable Employment at Azim Premji University (CSE-APU). We tried to assess the food situation in India in 2020 based on these surveys.

The CSE-APU compilation includes 76 surveys at the time of writing (late April 2021). Many of them, however, focus on specific groups or areas and shed limited light on the general situation, valuable as they are in their own right. In many cases, the sample is also small, odd or unclear. In this short review, we focus mainly on multi-state surveys (the "reference surveys" from now) that have a sample size of at least 1,000 and a reasonably clear sampling method. Other surveys, of course, also produced useful insights – we shall refer to some of them from time to time. Sampling methods and related details of the reference surveys are

presented in the Appendix – to keep things simple, we shall skip most of this information in the text.

The reference surveys, by and large, focus on the informal sector of the economy, or sub-groups of it such as slum dwellers or migrant workers. During the national lockdown, they were mainly telephonic surveys, possibly missing the poorest households. Only one survey claims to be representative of the population as a whole throughout 2020: the Consumer Pyramids Household Survey of the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE). We shall discuss it separately.

Income and Employment

Numerous surveys present evidence of a sharp decline in employment and incomes during the national lockdown, in April-May 2020 – no surprise here.¹ The Dalberg survey, a large (and largely representative) survey across 15 states, indicates that the proportion of households affected by income reductions was well above 80% in both months, with nearly a quarter of households earning no income at all. This is broadly consistent with CMIE data, discussed further on.

Table 1 presents available estimates of average income reduction in different months compared with pre-lockdown levels. Clearly, large income losses persisted well after the national lockdown.

A few surveys are particularly informative as far as income and employment are concerned. The “IDinsight+” survey, covering nearly 5,000 households in six states, found that the average weekly income of non-agricultural respondents crashed from Rs. 6,858 in March 2020 to Rs. 1,929 in May, and was still around that level in September. The proportion of non-agricultural respondents who reported zero days of work shot up from 7.3% in early March to 23.6% in the first week of May and was still as high as 16.2% in the first week of September.

The Dalberg survey (47,000 households in 15 states) found that primary income earners of 52% of households were unemployed in May despite having a job before the lockdown, and another 20% were still employed but earning less than before. Urban households were worse hit than rural households – this is corroborated by other surveys. The CEP-LSE survey (8,500 individuals in urban areas of Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh) also indicates a sharp increase in unemployment – from 1.9% before the lockdown to 15.5% in May-July among those aged 18-40 years. Average income in the sample dropped by 48%, and the share of

¹ The national lockdown (imposed from 24 March 2020) actually lasted well into June, and some aspects of it (e.g. closure of schools and anganwadis) continued even after that. But April-May 2020 is a useful reference period for the full-fledged national lockdown.

income going to the top quartile increased from 64% to 80%, reflecting a sharp rise in pre-existing income inequalities.

The most recent survey with detailed income data, by CSE-APU, found that 19% of informal-sector workers who had a job before the lockdown were unemployed in September-November 2020 (the corresponding figures for men and women were 15% and 22% respectively). The rest, however, had more or less recovered their pre-lockdown earning levels. The fact that employment losses were worse for women than men is corroborated by other surveys.²

In short, all available surveys point to large-scale unemployment and massive income losses not only during the national lockdown but throughout the rest of 2020. It is doubtful that income and employment ever regained their pre-lockdown levels before a second wave of the Covid-19 epidemic hit the country in early 2021.³

Food Insecurity

As one might expect, drastic employment and income declines in 2020 led to a surge in food insecurity. Table 2 presents summary evidence on this from the reference surveys. The different surveys are not strictly comparable, but they clearly point to severe food insecurity during the national lockdown. Even the least alarming estimate, by IDinsight, suggests that a large proportion (26%) of households were eating less than usual at that time. Once again, hardship lasted well beyond the national lockdown. The CSE-APU survey, for instance, found that the proportion of households eating less than before the lockdown was still as high as 60% in October-December 2020, compared with 77% during the lockdown.

The situation was predictably worse among disadvantaged groups. For instance, ActionAid reported that 35% of nearly 10,000 informal workers (mainly migrants) were eating less than two meals a day in May. Similarly, the “PRADAN+” survey covering informal-sector workers in rural areas of 13 states (mainly dairy and poultry workers) found that half of them were eating fewer meals than before. In Bihar, a survey of some 20,000 returning migrant workers found that close to 60 percent were unable to ensure two square meals a day for all members of the family in June 2020, with a similar proportion in July. Another survey in Bihar found

² On this, see also Deshpande (2020a). The decline of paid employment opportunities for women, it appears, was accompanied by an increase in the burden of domestic work, possibly because more family members were at home (Deshpande 2020b). On a more positive note, women appear to have benefited more than men from the expansion of NREGA employment in 2020, because they had fewer alternatives (Afridi et al 2021).

³ An important confirmation of this comes from an ongoing study (Dhingra and Kondirolli, forthcoming) based on a follow-up CEP-LSE survey in January-March 2021.

that food insecurity was especially high among Dalits (Singhal et al. 2021). In September-October 2020, two thirds of the respondents in the Right to Food Campaign’s “Hunger Watch” survey (adults from India’s poorest households) said that they were eating less nutritious food at that time than before the lockdown – a chilling thought.

The CMIE Surveys

The Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy conducts a periodic nation-wide household survey, the Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS), in successive four-months “waves”. This is a panel data set (sample households normally remain the same over time), based on “an all-India representative sample of over 170,000 households” according to the CMIE website. During the national lockdown, CMIE switched to telephonic interviews and the response rate was much lower than usual – as low as 30% in April 2020 (compared with 87% in February 2020). While CMIE claims that the sample remained largely representative (Vyas 2020), some under-representation of poor households in April-August 2020 is more than likely.⁴ The findings reported below must be read in this light.

Trends in per-capita income (PCI) at constant prices are displayed in Figure 1 for three groups: the top quartile, middle half, and bottom quartile of the PCI scale in each month (from month to month, there would be some “mobility” between these three groups).⁵ During the lockdown, the entire PCI distribution shifted to the left, but much more so at the bottom of the distribution: the poorest quartile earned nothing. In the top quartile, PCI declined, but only by 25% or so (taking the 12-month average for 2019 as the base). After the lockdown, per-capita incomes gradually recovered, but they were still below the 2019 average in November 2020, when the CPHS series ends as things stand. Similar patterns apply to per-capita expenditure (PCE), but with more even declines across groups. As Figure 2 indicates, PCE declined by about 50% in each group during the national lockdown, followed by a gradual

⁴ According to Bertrand et al. (2020): “CPHS continued to run through the lockdown with roughly 45 percent of its usual sample, and returned to ‘normal’ survey operations by mid-August. Despite the disruption to surveying imposed by COVID-19 and the lockdown measures, the data collected has remained representative throughout the period.” It is, however, difficult to understand how the survey “remained representative” in spite of a switch to telephonic surveys that must have led to a disproportionate exclusion of poor households. (In the Dalberg survey, 20% of potential respondents were unreachable for reasons like lack of a mobile, money for top-up, or network coverage; as the authors note, “[t]hose excluded are likely worse off than those we were able to reach by phone...”.)

⁵ In this and other CPHS-based figures, we have used the Consumer Price Index (CPI, Combined General Index) to deflate money incomes and expenditures.

and partial recovery later in 2020.⁶ Of course, the consequences of a 50% PCE decline are likely to be far more serious for the poor than for the rich.

Trends in expenditure on selected food items are shown in Figure 3, where households are grouped in the same way as in Figure 2, i.e. by PCE quantiles.⁷ Expenditure declines are relatively small for cereals (and also pulses – not shown), but expenditure on nutritious food items such as fruit, eggs, fish and meat declined dramatically in all groups. Compared with 2019 averages, CPI-deflated food expenditure in the bottom PCE quartile was just 51% for fruit, 58% for eggs and 38% for meat and fish during the national lockdown (April-May 2020). Recovery was possibly faster for food expenditure than for total expenditure, but even over a two-month period this is a nutritional catastrophe, bearing in mind that baseline consumption levels are very low in the first place.

Relief Measures: Too Little, Too Late

As mentioned earlier, limited relief measures were initiated during the national lockdown – some by the central government and others by state governments. Since relief measures are aptly discussed in a companion article (Khera and Malhotra forthcoming), we confine ourselves to some broad observations based on the reference surveys.

The surveys make it amply clear that public support played a critical role in sustaining poor people during and after the national lockdown. The PDS, in particular, reached a vast majority of the population.⁸ As Table 3 indicates, in five large-scale multi-state surveys, the proportion of households with a ration card (mainly NFSA cardholders) varied between 75% and 91%. Access to the PDS is likely to be higher than average among poor households. Conditional on having a ration card, the proportion of respondents who had received some foodgrain from

⁶ In both figures (and also in Figure 3), the income/expenditure dip appears to begin just *before* the national lockdown. Perhaps this pattern reflects inaccurate recall, and/or some economic slowdown in the immediate pre-lockdown period (Bertrand et al. 2020).

⁷ It is important not to read these figures as plain quantity trends, since they are also influenced by changes in relative prices. Cereal prices, for instance, have been increasing more slowly than the CPI in recent years, so that CPI-deflated cereal expenditure is declining, but that does not mean that cereal intake is declining. The large changes during and after lockdown, however, are clearly driven by quantity changes rather than price changes.

⁸ The NFSA requires the PDS to cover at least 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population, based on the latest Census figures. These national ratios have been adjusted state-wise to ensure that PDS coverage is higher in the poorer states (e.g. 86%/60% in rural/urban Jharkhand). Some states have distributed additional ration cards, outside the NFSA, at their own expense. Chhattisgarh has its own Food Security Act, with near-universal coverage in rural areas. For further details, see Khera and Somanchi (2020).

the PDS during the reference period was higher than 80% in all the surveys except one (Gaon Connection), and higher than 90% in four surveys (Table 3).⁹

A significant minority of ration-card holders, however, had not received any foodgrain rations during the reference period. Further, PDS utilization does not imply that the concerned households received their full entitlements. Aside from their normal NFSA entitlements (5 kg per person per month for Priority Households and 35 kg per month for Antyodaya households, the poorest of the poor), NFSA cardholders were supposed to get additional monthly rations of 5 kg per person, for free, from April to November 2020. About 30 million tonnes of wheat and rice were distributed in 2020 as additional PDS rations in this manner, under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY). Four major surveys found that about 90% of sample households had received *some* free grain during the reference period (see Table 3). This is reassuring (regular rations are sold at a price, so free grain must refer to additional rations under PMGKAY), but it does not rule out the possibility that many people received less than their due by way of free grain.

As is well known, India's PDS is vulnerable to significant "leakages". The leakages, it appears, have declined in recent years, partly due to sustained post-NFSA reforms, but they remain substantial in some states (Drèze et al. 2019, 2020). It is possible that the leakages declined further in 2020, thanks to tighter monitoring, or that they increased, because of a lack of public awareness of the PMGKAY provisions. Alas, none of the surveys reviewed in this article included careful recording of the sort of information (type of ration card, quantity of PDS grain received, breakdown between regular and PMGKAY quotas, etc.) that would make it possible to estimate the leakages with any confidence.¹⁰

Similar issues arise with NREGA and even cash transfers. Take the case of the cash transfers of Rs. 500 to all Jan Dhan Yojana (JDY) accounts held by women in April-June 2020 under the central government's relief package. Not only were nearly 40% of poor households left out because they did not include an adult woman with a JDY account (Pande et al. 2020; Somanchi 2020), roughly one third of women with a JDY account also denied receiving any benefits, judging from numerous surveys (Totapally et al. 2020; RCRC 2020; NCCSO 2020). In addition to low awareness levels and lack of clarity on rules and eligibility, JDY transfers were also

⁹ Also of interest here are two surveys by a team of researchers affiliated to Yale and KREA universities, in Bihar and Chhattisgarh respectively (Barboni et al. 2020; Inclusion Economics 2021). In Chhattisgarh, access to the PDS was close to universal (95%) and the system worked quite well, as one would expect from earlier studies. The Bihar survey, focused on returned migrants, found much higher levels of food insecurity there, mitigated to some extent among those who had access to the PDS.

¹⁰ This also applies to the free distribution of pulses (1 kg per household per month, for NFSA cardholders) under PMGKAY.

plagued by account dormancy, transaction failures and vulnerability to fraud (Somanchi forthcoming). Contrary to the rosy claims of JAM (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, mobile) enthusiasts, the infrastructure of cash transfers in India is still far from satisfactory.

Limited and unreliable as they were, relief measures failed to make up for more than a small fraction of the income losses induced by the national lockdown and the economic crisis that followed, even among poor households. CMIE data, for instance, suggest that cash transfers from the central and state governments made up for less than 10% of average income losses in April-May 2020. For low-income households, the Dalberg survey suggests that government transfers compensated only 23% of income losses. (The estimated “transfers”, however, do not include NREGA wages or the implicit value of PDS rations.)

In the absence of adequate relief measures, there was a surge in indebtedness in 2020, and also some distress sale of household assets. The proportion of sample households that were constrained to borrow or defer payments during the national lockdown varied between 38% and 53% in three major surveys (Table 4). The corresponding proportions in follow-up surveys later in 2020 were lower, but still close to 20% (for the concerned reference period). Predictably, the compulsion to borrow was stronger for poorer households: in the Dalberg sample, for instance, all households in the poorest income quintile had borrowed money in April-May 2020 (as much as Rs. 7,370 on average). As Table 4 indicates, a significant minority of households were also constrained to sell or mortgage assets in 2020, during or after the national lockdown.

Given the possibility that relief measures may be required again in the near future, it is important to aim at more extensive and effective interventions. A transition from ad hoc, short-term measures to durable entitlements may help in this respect.

Concluding Remarks

This brief review covers a fraction of the rich insights that arise from available household surveys. Taken together, the 76 household surveys compiled by CSE-APU represent (along with CMIE data) an invaluable body of evidence on the humanitarian impact of the Covid-19 crisis, including many aspects we have not dealt with such as psychological damage, children’s wellbeing and the predicament of marginalised communities. As far as the right to food is concerned, a few points stand out.

First, there is overwhelming evidence that the national lockdown of April-May 2020 was associated with a tremendous food crisis. Large numbers of people struggled to feed their families, and food intake dipped in both qualitative and quantitative terms for a majority of

the population. There was a particularly sharp decline in the consumption of nutritious food including non-vegetarian items.

Second, there was some recovery from June 2020 onwards, when the lockdown was gradually relaxed, but hardship persisted well beyond that. Employment, income and nutrition levels were still much below pre-lockdown levels by the end of the year.

Third, relief measures helped, but they were patchy and their effective reach is uncertain. A large majority of the population had access to the PDS in 2020 (with enhanced monthly rations for 8 months), and this played a critical role in averting the worst. But it is possible that some of the supplementary rations got diverted, initially at least, and a significant minority of poor households had no access to the PDS at all for lack of a ration card. Other relief measures such as NREGA and cash transfers also had a patchy coverage. The Covid-19 crisis brings out once again that India needs a more reliable and comprehensive social security system.

This lesson, however, was lost on the central government, judging from the Union Budget 2021-22. Just before that, incidentally, partial findings of NFHS-5 (mentioned earlier) were officially released, adding to other obvious signs of a need to expand and improve nutrition-related interventions. Instead, there were severe cuts in financial allocations for ICDS, maternity benefits and the Ministry of Women and Child Development (Sharma 2021). No provision was made for further relief measures in 2021 (even in the limited form of contingency funds), even as enormous sums continued to be allocated to business concessions in the name of an economic stimulus. The central government seemed to be in blissful denial of the continuing livelihood crisis and to count on a “V-shaped recovery”.

A few weeks later, the second wave of Covid-19 hit the country with full force. The livelihood crisis may or may not be worse in 2021 than in 2020. There is no national lockdown this time, but there are local lockdowns of varying intensity and duration across the country. And in some respects, circumstances are more challenging today. People’s reserves are depleted and many are in heavy debt. The number of infections and deaths is much larger than last year, forcing large numbers of households to contend with heavy health expenditure if not the loss of a breadwinner. With mass vaccination making slow progress, hard times are likely to continue for many months. A second, stronger wave of relief measures is essential to avoid a repeat of last year’s tragic humanitarian crisis.

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Table 1: Average Income Reduction from Pre-lockdown Levels

Source	Reference period (2020)	Average income reduction (%)
Bertrand et al.	April-May	42
Dalberg	April-May	56
CSE-APU (Rd 1)	April-May	64
IDinsight+ (Rd 1)	May	72 ^a
CEP-LSE	May-July	48
IDinsight+ (Rd 2)	July	68 ^a
IDinsight+ (Rd 3)	Sept	74 ^a
CSE-APU (Rd 2)	Sept-Nov	50

^a Non-agricultural households.

Note: The last column refers to the average income reduction among sample households. For details of the respective samples, see Appendix. The first row is based on CMIE data (Bertrand et al. 2020).

Table 2: Food Insecurity

Indicator and Source	Reference period (2020) ^a	Incidence (%)
Eating less food than before (%)		
CSE-APU (Rd 1)	April-May	77
ActionAid (Rd 1)	May [*]	67
Hunger Watch ^b	October	53 ^c
CSE-APU (Rd 2)	Sept-Nov	60
Smaller meal size or fewer items in meals (%)		
PRADAN+ (Rd 1)	April [*]	68
IDinsight+ (Rd 1)	May	26
PRADAN+ (Rd 2)	June [*]	55
Gaon Connection	June-July [*]	46
IDinsight+ (Rd 2)	July	14
IDinsight+ (Rd 3)	September	13
RCRC (Rd 2)	Dec 20 - Jan 21 [*]	40
Fewer meals (%)		
PRADAN+ (Rd 1)	April [*]	50
PRADAN+ (Rd 2)	June [*]	43
Gaon Connection	June-July [*]	38
Eating less than two meals a day (%)		
ActionAid (Rd 1)	May [*]	34
ActionAid (Rd 2)	June [*]	19

^a Survey period, in cases (flagged with an asterisk) where the reference period for these indicators is not explicit.

^b Sample focuses on particularly vulnerable groups.

^c Pertains to cereal (rice and wheat) consumption.

Note: The last column indicates the proportion of affected households (or individuals, in the case of ActionAid) in the sample. For details of the samples, see Appendix.

Table 3: Access to the Public Distribution System

Source	Reference period (2020) ^a	Focus states	% of sample households that received grain from PDS	% of sample households that had a ration card	% of hhs with card that received grain from PDS	% of hhs with card that received <i>free</i> grain from PDS ^b
PRADAN+ (Rd 1)	April	AS, BH, CG, GJ, JH, KA, MH, MP, OD, RJ, UP, WB	-	-	84	-
Dalberg	April-May	AS, BH, GJ, HR, JH, KA, KL, MP, MH, OD, PB, RJ, TS, UP, WB	89	87	92	92
NCDHR	April-May *	AP, BH, KL, MH, MP, OD, UP	-	80 ^c	83	-
CSE-APU (Rd 1)	April-May	AP, BH, DL, GJ, JK, KA, MH, MP, OD, TL, UP, WB	78	-	-	-
RCRC (Rd 1)	April-May *	AP, AS, BR, GJ, JH, MP, OD, RJ, UP	-	-	-	88 ^d
RCRC (Rd 2)	April-June *	AP, AS, BR, CG, GJ, JH, MP, MG, OD, RJ, UP	-	90	-	92 ^e
MicroSave (Rd 1) ^f	May	All major states except CG, JH, HP, UK plus a few smaller states (18 states in total)	-	-	91	-
PRADAN+ (Rd 2)	June *	AS, BH, CG, GJ, JH, MP, OD, RJ, TR, UP, WB	-	-	84	-
Gaon Connection	June – July	All major states except AP, plus a few smaller states (20 states in total)	63	83	71	-
MicroSave (Rd 2) ^f	September	All major states except CG, JH, HP, UK plus a few smaller states (18 states)	-	-	94	-
IDinsight+ (Rd 3)	September	AP, BH, JH, MP, RJ, UP	68	75	89	88
CSE-APU (Rd 2)	Sept-Nov	AP, BH, DL, GJ, JK, KA, MH, MP, OD, RJ, TL, WB, UP	-	91	91	-

^a Survey period, in cases (flagged with an asterisk) where the reference period for these indicators is not explicit.

^b Refers to supplementary foodgrain rations distributed for free under PMGKAY.

^c Includes APL cardholders.

^d 52% had received free grain “more than once” and 36% “only once”, at the time of the survey.

^e 50% had received free grain “thrice or more”, 31% “twice” and 11% “once”, at the time of the survey.

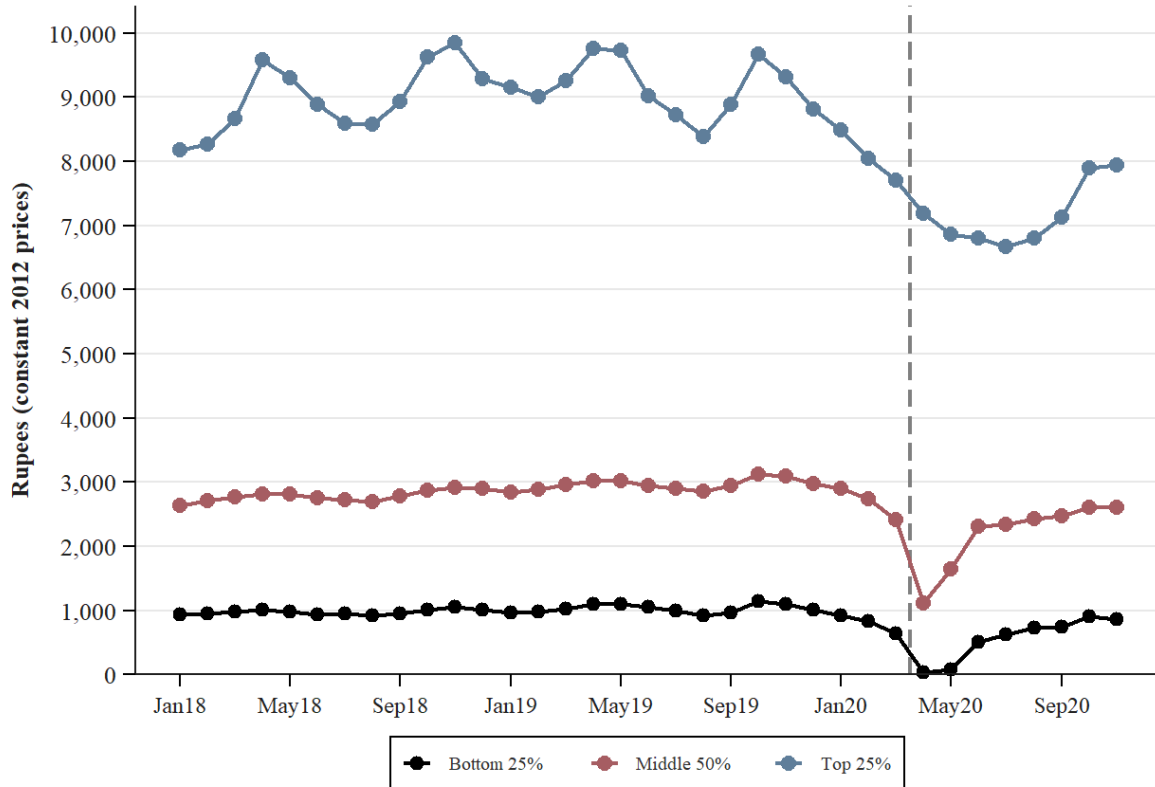
^f Forthcoming report; the MicroSave (Rd 2) findings are also cited (with minor inaccuracies) in Haq (2021).

Table 4: Indebtedness and Distress Sales

	Survey period (2020)	Proportion of affected households (%)
Borrowed money or deferred payments during the reference period ^a		
Dalberg	April-May	40
PRADAN+ (Rd 1)	April	38
ActionAid (Rd 1)	May	53
PRADAN+ (Rd 2)	June	17
RCRC (Rd 2)	July	16
ActionAid (Rd 2)	August	39
RCRC (Rd 3)	Dec 20 - Jan 21	16
Mortgaged or sold household assets during the reference period ^a		
PRADAN+ (Rd 1)	April	14
PRADAN+ (Rd 1)	June	15
RCRC (Rd 2)	July	9
RCRC (Rd 3)	Dec 20 - Jan 21	8

^a Normally, the reference period consists of a short time interval (e.g. a few weeks) just before the survey; for the Dalberg survey, it consists of April-May 2020.

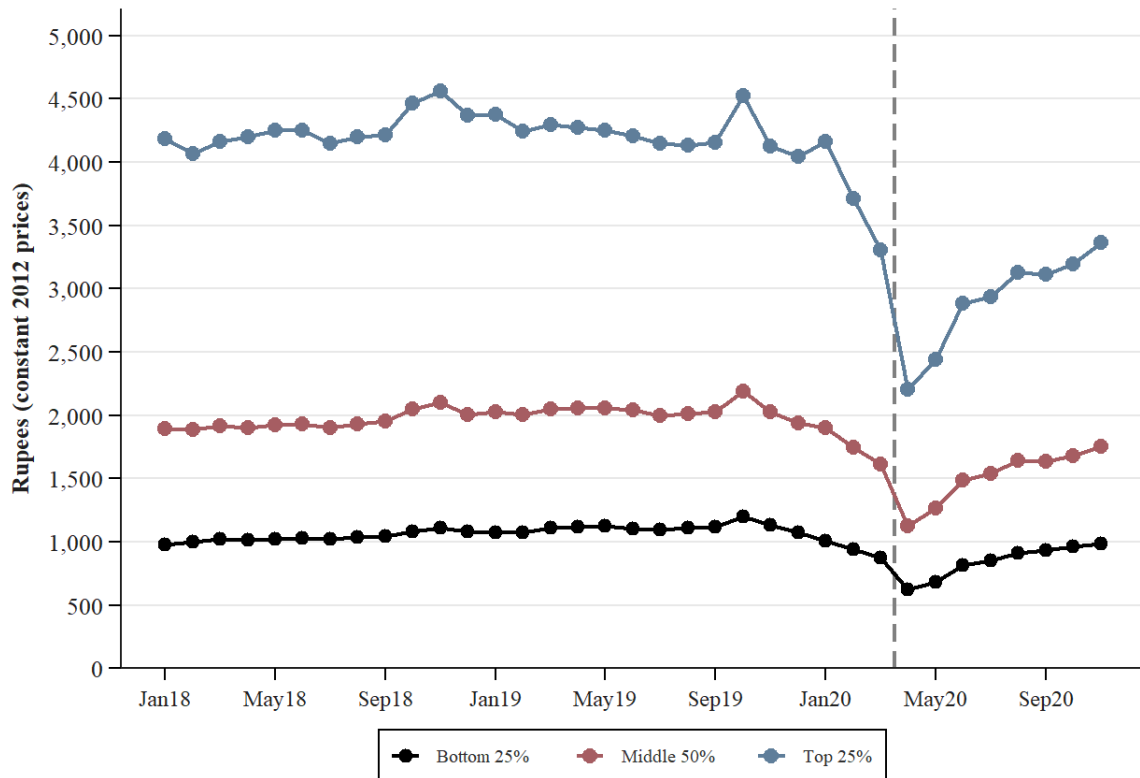
Figure 1: Mean Monthly Per-Capita Income (PCI)



Note: Households are grouped by PCI quantiles. Figures are weighted to account for sampling design.

Source: Calculated from CPHS (CMIE) data.

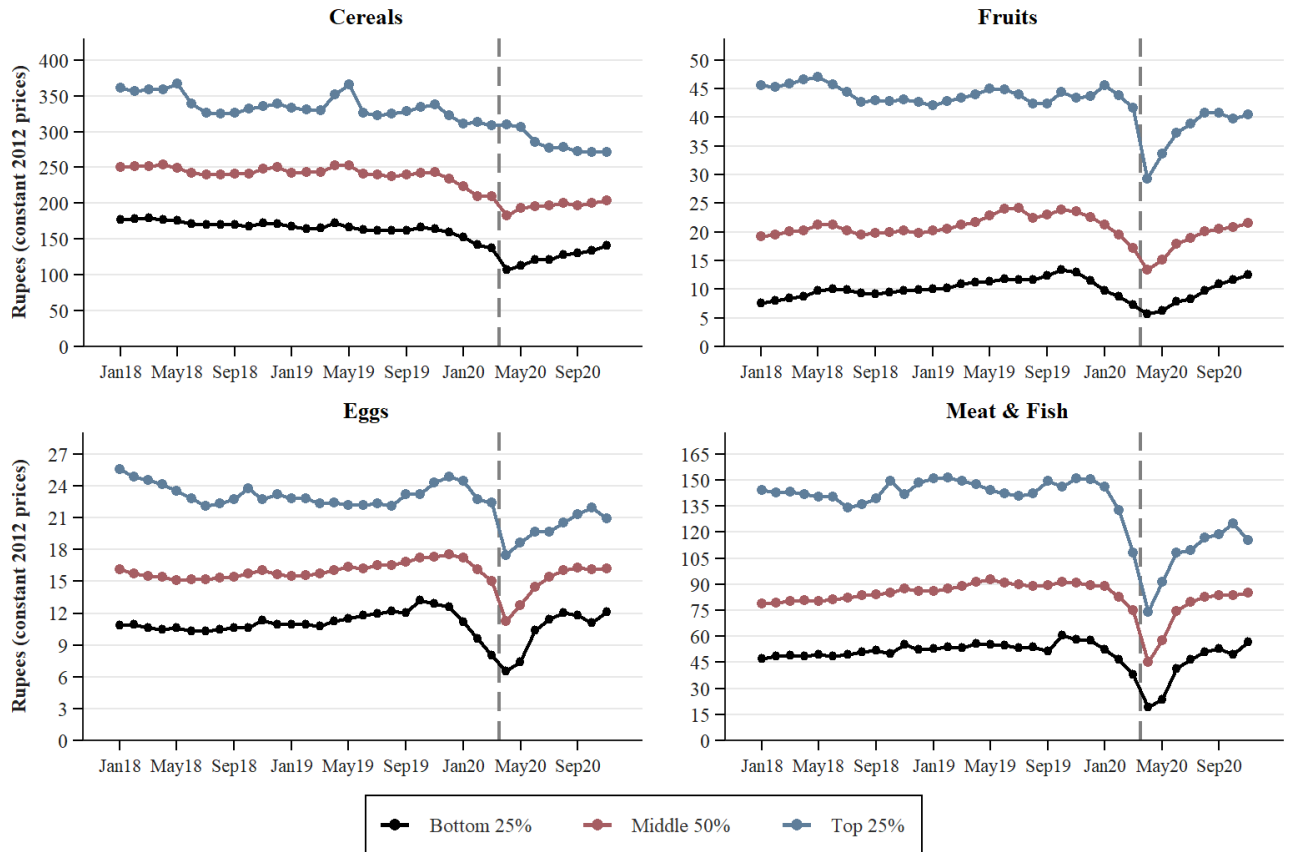
Figure 2: Mean Monthly Per-Capita Expenditure (PCE)



Note: Households are grouped by PCE quantiles. Figures are weighted to account for sampling design.

Source: Calculated from CPHS (CMIE) data.

Figure 3: Mean Monthly Per-Capita Expenditure on Selected Food Items



Note: Households are grouped by PCE quantiles, based on overall expenditure. Figures are weighted to account for sampling design.

Source: Calculated from CPHS (CMIE) data.

Appendix: Further Details of Reference Surveys

Survey	Survey Period	Location	Sample Size and Reference Population ^a	Basic Features of the Sample
ActionAid	May 2020	AP, BR, DL, GA, GJ, HP, HR, JH, KA, MP, MH, OD, PB, RJ, TN, TS, UK, UP, WB	11,530 informal-sector workers (mainly migrants).	<u>Sampling method:</u> Respondents were selected from communities that ActionAid or their partner organizations were working with pre-lockdown. <u>Demographics:</u> 67% migrants; 28% female; 54% SC/ST; 72% landless.
CEP-LSE (Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics)	May-July 2020	BH, JH, UP	Individuals aged 18-40 years in urban areas. Sample size: 8,530	<u>Sampling method:</u> Random sample from database of phone numbers held by professional survey agency. Women over-sampled to compensate for low LFPR. Weights for age, gender, education categories constructed from PLFS 2017-18. <u>Demographics:</u> 56% studied till class 10 or less; 22% female; 40% SC/ST.
CSE-APU (Centre for Sustainable Employment at Azim Premji University)	Rd 1: Apr-May 2020 Rd 2: Oct-Dec 2020	AP, BH, DL, GJ, JH, KA, MH (Pune), MP, OD, RJ, TS, WB (Rd 1: 161 districts)	Informal-sector workers. Sample size: Rd 1: 4,942 Rd 2: 2,778 (100% Rd 1 repeat)	<u>Sampling method:</u> Sample chosen from communities that 10 partner CSOs had worked in. Stratified by occupation groups and geographical areas. <u>Demographics (Rd 1):</u> 58% from rural areas; 52% women; ~ 50% illiterate; majority farmers or casual labourers (rural) & service or construction workers (urban); 80% had income < Rs. 10,000 per month pre-lockdown.
Dalberg	April-June 2020	AS, BH, GJ, HR, JH, KA, KL, MP, MH, OD, PB, RJ, TS, UP, WB (80% of districts in these states were covered)	47,000 low-income households (earning less than Rs. 10,000 per month).	<u>Sampling method:</u> Random sample from database of phone numbers held by Kantar Public. Augmented by random-digit dialling (14%) and snowballing (6%) to reach sample target. Weights constructed from state-wise NFSA coverage (proxy for poor population). Claims to be largely representative of poor populations in the 15 surveyed states.

				<u>Demographics:</u> 69% rural; 33% construction and casual labourers; 43% agricultural households; 68% SC/ST/OBC.
Gaon Connection (with Lokniti-CSDS)	June-July 2020	A&NI, AS, AN, BH, CG, GJ, HP, HR, J&K, JH, KL, MH, MN, MP, OD, PB, RJ, SK, TR, UK, UP, WB (179 districts)	25,000 rural households from all socio-economic categories.	<u>Sampling method:</u> Households sampled from districts and villages where Gaon Connection had a presence. Responses weighted by state population. <u>Demographics:</u> 19% female; 29% SC/ST; 20% illiterate; 72% class 12 or less; 43% “poor”.
Hunger Watch	Sept-Oct 2020	CG, DL, GJ, JH, MH, MP, RJ, TN, TS, UP, WB	3,994 extremely vulnerable households (homeless, agricultural labourers, tea garden workers, etc.).	<u>Sampling method:</u> Local activists/researchers first identified vulnerable communities, then conducted focus group discussions to identify the most vulnerable households. <u>Demographics:</u> 79% had income below Rs. 7,000 per month pre-lockdown.
IDinsight + (IDinsight, World Bank and Data Development Lab)	Rd 1: May 2020 Rd 2: July 2020 Rd 3: Sept 2020	AP, BH, JH, MP, RJ, UP	~ 5,000 rural households from all socio-economic categories.	<u>Sampling method:</u> Quasi-random sample drawn from voter lists, village listings, household lists with ASHA/AWW, and soil health cards database (sampling frames from past projects and evaluations). “Idiosyncratic” weights used to account for sampling design. <u>Demographics:</u> 58% cultivate own land as primary occupation; 60% respondents had not finished high school; ~ 35% SC/ST.
NCDHR (National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights)	April-May 2020	AP, BH, KL, MH, MP, OD, TN, UP	25,032 SC/ST households.	<u>Sampling method:</u> Households sampled from areas and communities that NCDHR and local partners worked in. <u>Demographics:</u> ~ 85% SC, 15% ST.
PRADAN + ^b	Rd 1: April 2020 Rd 2: June 2020	AS, BH, CG, GJ, JH, KA, MH, MP, OD, RJ, UP, WB (47 districts)	Rural households, mainly poultry, dairy, aquaculture, livestock farmers. Sample size:	<u>Sampling method:</u> Rapid rural assessment with households purposively chosen by CSOs.

			Rd 1: 5,162 Rd 2: 4,835	<u>Demographics:</u> 17% hhs had returning migrants; 37% had a pregnant/lactating mother or a child below 6; 28% had a senior citizen or person with disability.
RCRC (Rapid Rural Community Response to Covid- 19)	Rd 1: May 2020 Rd 2: July 2020 Rd 3: Dec-Jan 2020-1	AP, AS, BR, CG, GJ, JH, MH, MG, MP, OD, RJ, TS, UP (68 districts, 118 blocks)	Rural households from all socio- economic categories. Sample size: Rd 1: 11,380 Rd 2: 17,032 (45% Rd 1 repeat) Rd 3: 11,766 (40% Rd 1 repeat)	<u>Sampling method:</u> Quasi-random sample. Five villages per block, ~ 100 households per block. Households selected using “every 5 th household” rule. <u>Demographics:</u> 41-63% female; 54-58% SC/ST; 45-58% casual labourers.

^a Unless stated otherwise, the respective surveys covered both rural and urban areas.

^b PRADAN, Action for Social Advancement, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India), BAIF, Grameen Sahara, i-Saksham, SAATHI-UP, SeSTA, Seva Mandir, Transform Rural India Foundation.