REFERENCES

ABC Radio Australia. (2020). Timor-Leste: Fighting dengue during COVID-19. 16 June 2020. https://www.abc.net.au/radio-australia/programs/pacificbeat/timor-dengue-fixed/12360020

AFD (2020). COVID-19 and countries in conflict: Serious social and economic impact. May 2020. https://www.afd.fr/en/actualites/covid-19-and-countries-conflict-serious-social-and-economic-impact

Bousquet, F., & Fernandez-Taranco, O. (2020). COVID-19 in Fragile Settings: Ensuring a Conflict-Sensitive Response. https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/covid-19-fragile-settings-ensuring-conflict-sensitive-response

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Global TB Programs and COVID-19 Key Considerations and Resources. June 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/globalhivtb/who-we-are/about-us/globaltb/globaltbandcovid19.html

E-Global Notícias em Português (2020). Timor-Leste: Lu-Olo e Governo analisam segurança fronteiriça. 11 September 2020. https://e-global.pt/noticias/lusofonia/timor-leste/timor-leste-lu-olo-e-governo-analisam-seguranca-fronteirica/

IFC (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on the water and sanitation sector. June 2020. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/126b1a18-23d9-46f3-beb7-047c20885bf6/The+Impact+of+COVID_Water%26Sanitation_final_web.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=ncaG-hA

France Info. (2020). Le Covid-19 mieux géré en Asie: «Une épidémie comme ça, il faut lui sauter à la gorge», explique un microbiologiste. 12 November 2020. https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sante/maladie/coronavirus/video-covid-19-une-epidemie-comme-ca-il-faut-lui-sauter-a-la-gorge-un-microbiologiste-francais-explique-pourquoi-l-asie-s-en-sort-mieux_4178323.html

Geldsetzer, P., Reinmuth, M., Ouma, P., et al. (2020). Mapping physical access to healthcare for older adults in sub-Saharan Africa and implications for the COVID-19 response: a cross sectional analysis. The Lancet Healthy Longevity.

Hogan, A. B., Jewell, B. L., Sherrard-Smith, E., Vesga, J. F., Watson, O. J., Whittaker, C., & Baguelin, M. (2020). Potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria in low-income and middle-income countries: a modelling study. The Lancet Global Health, 8(9), e1132-e1141.

Hulland, E. (2020). COVID-19 and health care inaccessibility in sub-Saharan Africa. The Lancet Healthy Longevity, 1(1).

Juran, S., Broer, P., Klug, S., et al. (2018). Geospatial mapping of access to timely essential surgery in sub-Saharan Africa. BMJ Global Health.

Kraindler, J., Barclay, C., & Tallack, C. (2020). Understanding changes to mortality during the pandemic. The Health Foundation. August 2020. https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/understanding-changes-to-all-mortality-during-the-pandemic

Michelozzi P, de'Donato F, Scortichini M, De Sario M, Noccioli F, Rossi P, et al. (2020). Mortality impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak by sex and age: rapid mortality surveillance system, Italy, 1 February to 18 April 2020. Euro Surveill.

Minoletti, P., & Hein, A. (2020). Coronavirus policy response needs and options for Myanmar (Rep.). International Growth Center, London. https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Hein-2020-coronavirus-report.pdf

Molyneux, D., Aboe, A., Isiyaku, S., & Bush, S. (2020). COVID-19 and neglected tropical diseases in Africa: impacts, interactions, consequences. International Health, Volume 12, Issue 5, Pages 367–372. https://doi.org/10.1093/inthealth/ihaa040.

Moore, J (2020). What African Nations Are Teaching the West About Fighting the Coronavirus. The New Yorker. 15 May 2020. https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/what-african-nations-are-teaching-the-west-about-fighting-the-coronavirus

Neves, G (2020). Timor Leste's COVID-19 Response. The Diplomat. 03 June 2020. https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/timor-lestes-covid-19-response/

Nogueira PJ, Nobre MA, Nicola PJ, Furtado C, Vaz Carneiro A. (2020). Excess mortality estimation during the COVID-19 pandemic: preliminary data from Portugal. Acta Med Port.

Oxfam (2020). Yemen facing hidden cholera crisis as COVID cases set to peak in coming weeks. 29 July 2020. https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/yemen-facing-hidden-cholera-crisis-covid-cases-set-peak-coming-weeks-oxfam

Panthee, B. et al. (2020). COVID-19: the current situation in Nepal. New Microbes and New Infections, Volume 37, 2020. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2052297520300895

Sinnathamby MA, Whitaker H, Coughlan L, Lopez Bernal J, Ramsay M, Andrews N. (2020). All-cause excess mortality observed by age group and regions in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in England. Euro Surveill.

Shadmi, E., et al. (2020). Health equity and COVID-19: global perspectives. International Journal for Equity and Health.19(1), 1-16.

UNCT (2020). Inspiring story: Caring for the mental wellbeing of Bhutan. https://www.unct.org.bt/we-care-we-share-inspiring-story-caring-for-the-mental-wellbeing-of-bhutan/

UNICEF (2020). Fact sheet: Lack of handwashing with soap puts millions at increased risk to COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. 14 October 2020. https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/fact-sheet-lack-handwashing-soap-puts-millions-increased-risk-covid-19-and-other

UN (2020). Covid-19 and Universal Health Coverage, Policy Brief, October 2020. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_universal_health_coverage.pdf

Vestergaard LS, Nielsen J, Richter L, Schmid D, Bustos N, Braeye T, et al. (2020). Excess all-cause mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe—preliminary pooled estimates from the Euro MOMO network, March to April 2020. Euro Surveill.

WHO (2020a). Responding to multiple emergencies in Sudan. 07 October 2020. https://www.who.int/health-cluster/news-and-events/news/Multiple-emergencies-Sudan/en/

WHO (2020b). WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard. https://covid19.who.int

WHO (2020c). COVID-19 significantly impacts health services for noncommunicable diseases. June 2020. https://www.who.int/news/item/01-06-2020-covid-19-significantly-impacts-health-services-for-noncommunicable-diseases

World Bank Group (2020). In the Face of Coronavirus, African Countries Apply Lessons from Ebola Response. 03 April 2020. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/04/03/in-the-face-of-coronavirus-african-countries-apply-lessons-from-ebola-response

World Population Review (2020). https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/

B. THE CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 ON WELLBEING

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant disruption in everyday life, with wider socio-economic implications globally. This section will focus on the following aspects to assess the consequences of COVID-19 on wellbeing in LDCs, which are closely related to several SDGs: poverty measurements; employment (including in the informal economy); and access to education, given the limited digital and Internet connectivity. For an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on other well-being measures such as health and food security, see sections A and C. of this report, respectively.

B.1 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON POVERTY

LDCs have generally lagged behind on SDG 1 (poverty eradication), with the number of people living in extreme poverty in the LDCs rising from 340 million in 2010 to 349 million in 2018 (Akiwumi and Valensisi, 2020). Due to the challenges arising from conducting household surveys, there is often a lag of a few years in poverty estimates. World Bank pre-COVID data on poverty shows that the rate of extreme poverty in the LDCs, measured as the population living below US$1.90 per day was about 35.1 percent in 2018 (see Figure B.1). While this shows modest reduction in poverty rates of approximately 5 percentage points since 2010, SDG 1 of eradicating poverty in LDCs is still far-fetched. Indications from the impact of COVID-19 on poverty show an upward trend, wiping out years of progress made in alleviating poverty. UN Women forecasts show that by 2030, poverty rates among females and males are expected to be at 32.7 percent and 32.2 percent, respectively (UN Women, 2020).

The figure also shows that reduction in the poverty gap, which reflects both the depth of poverty and its incidence, slowed down between 2010 and 2018, when it declined by only two percentage points[16].

Recent projections by the World Bank[17] suggest that COVID-19 has led to an increase in extreme poverty globally by between 119 million and 124 million people, the largest increase in extreme poverty since 1990. While extreme poverty was predominantly rural before COVID-19, the World Bank projections

Modest progress in poverty reduction in LDCs is reversed

Recent projections by the World Bank[17] suggest that COVID-19 has led to an increase in extreme poverty globally between

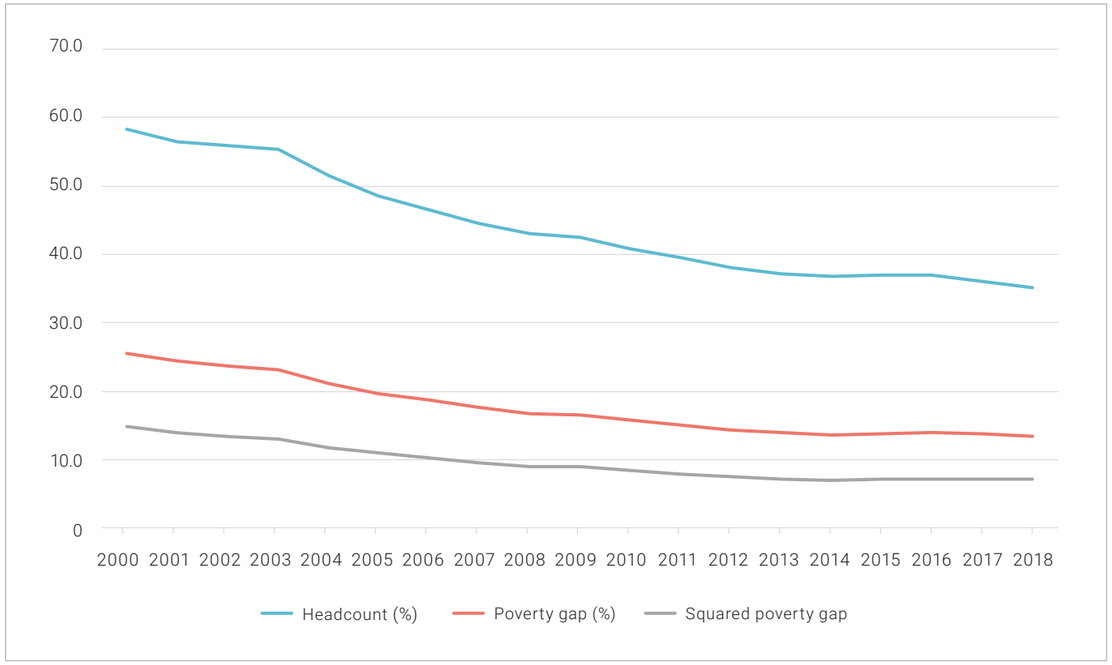
119-124 MILLION PEOPLE

the largest increase in extreme poverty since 1990.

[16] The squared poverty gap, which puts more weight the further a poor person's observed income falls below the poverty line remained constant during this time period.

[17] https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-looking-back-2020-and-outlook-2021

Figure B.1: Poverty estimates using 2011 PPP and US$1.90/day poverty line



Source: PovcalNet: the online tool for poverty measurement developed by the Development Research Group of the World Bank. Available at http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/povOnDemand.aspx. Based on estimates from 43 LDCs (no data are available for Afghanistan, Cambodia, Eritrea and Somalia).

indicate that the new poor are more urban, better educated and work in industries such as informal services, construction, and manufacturing (Wall Street Journal, 7 October 2020).[18]

According to Sánchez-Páramo (2020), this finding was confirmed in countries such as Bangladesh and Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, where high-frequency monitoring surveys of COVID-19 impacts on households were used, 60.5 percent of urban households reported having suffered an income loss due to COVID-19, compared to 51.6 percent of rural households. However, it is important to caution that rural areas are also likely to experience a deterioration in living conditions, including among the existing poor. The effect arises through the loss of income channel arising from mobility restrictions, which increasingly affect farm and non-farm activities and access to markets in rural areas. In addition, in some instances, rural communities are also facing critical challenges as they integrate massive inflows of returning migrants in a context of limited access to food and supplies. People living with disabilities in both urban and rural areas are disproportionately affected by the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, as expressed in Box I.

The expansion of social protection programs has an important role to play in pandemic response and to support the generation of inclusive growth. Cash transfers are an especially promising avenue, as they are effective at improving a number of development outcomes. These include raising individuals' incomes and asset ownership, improving their nutritional status and mental health, and lowering their risk of experiencing illness or intimate partner violence. Digital payments can offer the opportunity to distribute cash transfers in a manner compliant with social distancing (Strohm and Goldberg, 2020).

However, social protection in LDCs is limited, which exacerbates vulnerability across all dimensions of human development. Coverage is hampered by limited institutional capacity, which presents challenges in reaching the most marginalized groups. As such, lack of social protection constitutes a major obstacle to economic and social development. Notwithstanding the commitment of many LDCs, as shown in their national development plans, voluntary national reviews and other policy documents, a lack of and limited resources are major constraints (UN-OHRLLS, 2020). Average spending on social protection as a percentage of GDP in the LDCs is only 3 percent, which is less than half the average of 6.3 percent for middle-income countries. In at least eight of the LDCs, the estimated cost of a more comprehensive package of social protection (child, orphans, maternity, disability, and old age) would exceed 6.5 percent of GDP. This cannot be financed from domestic resources alone, as the average government revenue in the LDCs is only 15 percent of GDP (UN-OHRLLS, 2018).

[18] https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-has-thrown-around-100-million-people-into-extreme-poverty-world-bank-estimates-11602086400

B.2 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE LABOUR MARKET AND INCOME[19]

Several countries around the world introduced lockdown measures to try and curb the spread of COVID-19 and subsequently, flatten the curve. More than 30 LDCs had in place severe or very severe measures from early April to mid-May 2020. This included 15 LDCs with required workplace closures for all except essential sectors and 17 with closures required for some sectors. Due to the significant negative impact on employment and the economy, such measures were reversed. As of 30 June 2020, only 3 LDCs (Afghanistan, Eritrea and Sudan) had in place required workplace closures for all but key workers, while 19 had required closures for some sectors. However, as of 30 July 2020, over 80 percent of all workers in LDCs resided in countries with some form of workplace closures. This was largely a result of closures that were reintroduced in South Asia, for example, Bangladesh and Nepal.

While it is not yet clear how many have lost their jobs, either globally or in LDCs, as a result of the pandemic, anecdotal evidence exists. For example, in Timor-Leste, in about 17.6 percent of the households, one member lost their job. In about 5 percent of households, two or more members lost their jobs; 2.5 percent had two members becoming unemployed, and 2.3 percent had three members becoming unemployed (Government of Timor-Leste, 2020).

In general, the impact of the pandemic on jobs and income is through both economic demand and supply pathways. As indicated in section D., LDCs are experiencing an unprecedented demand shock due to COVID-19. The pandemic has led to a decrease in quantities and prices for LDCs' exports and drops in tourism and remittances. On the other hand, restriction of movement, mandated market closures at home and abroad, physical distancing, and other forms of supply side bottlenecks have adversely affected production prospects and the balance of payments in most LDCs. These multiple demand and supply side shocks are being felt deeply in the already fragile labour markets.

According to the Royal Government of Bhutan (2020), COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the tourism and related service sector. This has led to a decline in wages and income that may negatively impact livelihoods and poverty in the country. Furthermore, the repatriation of a substantial number of Bhutanese (mostly youth) from foreign countries has aggravated the unemployment pool in the nation. The Government further cautions that with widespread supply chain and demand disruptions, many businesses face insolvency. This has been reinforced by layoffs across the board resulting in lower household incomes and livelihood disruption.

As most workers in LDCs are in the informal economy, the lockdown – albeit short-lived – had immediate negative implications. This is because workers in the informal economy have little cash reserves, no access to teleworking and weak social protection systems. Informal workers, whether employed or self-employed, are most at risk of losing their jobs as confinement measures force them to stay home or keep their customers away. The fact that the pandemic has led to higher unemployment and inactivity is likely to lead to further informality, underconsumption, hunger and long-lasting poverty (see sub-section on poverty).

In addition, job losses are likely to be experienced in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Emerging evidence shows that MSMEs are 'overrepresented' in sectors most affected by COVID-19, including non-food manufacturing and services such as accommodation and food, retail and wholesale trade, travel and transport – sectors in which barriers to entry are relatively low. MSMEs provide the bulk of jobs and are being particularly hit across Africa where informal firms dominate employment. In order to facilitate job creation in low-income communities, public works and urban programs are being launched or scaled up. In the Central African Republic, the largest cash-for-work program in the country supported by the World Bank has produced more than two million masks with the objective of producing 10 million, to provide two free masks for every citizen at the same time generating livelihood opportunities. In countries such as Ethiopia and Senegal, projects to accelerate slum upgrading activities and help generate work are underway.[20]

In Bangladesh, the informal sector and MSMEs, which employ 85 percent of the total employment, have been the worst-hit by COVID-19. As the government enforced general holidays, lockdowns, closures of factories and businesses to prevent the spread of coronavirus infections, production as well as income of workers has reduced significantly. This economic disruption has affected the livelihoods of millions of people

[19] Some of the content in this sub-section is based on a paper by ILO (2021).
[20] See https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2020/06/02/world-banks-response-to-covid-19-coronavirus-in-africa

employed in both formal and informal sectors of the country. The contagion effect will slow down the service sectors including tourism, transport, and entertainment due to lacklustre demand. The loss of jobs in these sectors will put more burden on the public exchequer through mounting demand for social safety. For workers' salary, the Bangladeshi Government has declared two support packages of total US$764.27 million. The packages are–(i) Special Fund for Salary support to export oriented manufacturing industry workers worth US$588.2 million and (ii) Social Protection (Cash transfer) Program for the export-oriented industry workers worth US$ 176.5 million (Government of Bangladesh, 2020).

The ILO finds that the closure of workplaces and implementation of other containment measures as a result of COVID-19, combined with the rapid deterioration of economic conditions, led to immediate and massive losses in working hours during the second quarter of 2020. In low-income countries (most of which are LDCs), the decline in working hours is estimated at 13.9 percent, which is lower than all other income groups. This implies that many workers in poorer countries were forced to maintain their working routines out of economic necessity–especially the self-employed, daily wage labourers and low-skilled workers, not least because the nature of their work required physical proximity to others.

In the absence of the latest conventional labour market statistics, especially in LDCs, ILO and other international organisations have conducted several rapid labour market assessments to provide immediate, real-time support on assessing the employment and income impact of COVID-19. Both the modelled estimates and ad-hoc surveys point to large job losses.

Analogous to the finding on poverty, COVID-19 disproportionately affected those informal, low-skilled and low-productive urban employment, including retailing, transportation, construction, restaurants, personal services and domestic workers. ILO estimates suggest, for instance, that earnings for informal workers in the first month of the crisis might have declined by over 80 percent in low-income countries. A recent survey by ITC shows that 76 percent of firms (of all sizes) in the food and accommodation business were 'strongly affected' by the pandemic, and a further 14 percent said that they were 'moderately affected' (ITC, 2020a).

About 25 million informal workers are at risk of losing their jobs (ILO, 2020a). These workers are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic because they have no social and health protection; they lack bargaining power; and their remoteness and isolation may deprive them of emergency assistance. According to ILO, lost incomes in the informal sector could raise poverty rates by 56 percentage-points in low-income economies (ILO, 2020b). With little hope of receiving any income support from their governments, the unemployed may be forced to sell off assets, borrow from 'loan sharks' or resort to child labor (FAO, 2020). Because informal workers must work for their own and their family's survival, lockdown measures could breed social tension and breach of confinement measures, compromise government efforts to deal with the crisis.

Furthermore, women in the labour force have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. This is largely due to their over-representation in labour intensive low-skilled activities (see also ILO, 2020). These types of jobs also tend to be underpaid and undervalued, with hardly any social protection measures. Additionally, unpaid care obligations on the backdrop of school and child-care closures exacerbated this trend. In normal times, women provide around three quarters of all unpaid care work. The amount of time dedicated by women to unpaid care work increases with the presence of children in the household. During the pandemic, the closures of early childhood education centres, care services and schools, along with the unavailability of older relatives to provide support, have exacerbated care demands, affecting women more than men (Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Affairs, 2020; ILO, 2020).

These findings reinforce the immediate need for more secure and reliable social protection for workers in the informal economy, especially women.

There is also some evidence that the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of new technologies as firms looked to cut costs and adopt new ways of working. A recent report by the World Economic Forum (2020)[21] while not focused on poorer countries such as LDCs, warned that by 2025, half of all work tasks will be handled by machines. This is because, millions of routine or manual jobs would be displaced by technology, affecting the lowest paid, lowest skilled workers the most. These findings were based on surveys conducted with employers in select developed and emerging economies. On the other hand, roles that relied on human skills such as advising, decision-making, reasoning, communicating and interacting would rise in demand. There has specifically been a surge in demand for workers who can fill green economy jobs, roles at the forefront of the data and AI economy, as well as new roles in engineering, cloud computing and product development (see also section F on the role of STI during a pandemic).

[21] See also https://www.bbc.com/news/business-54622189

If left unchecked, this is likely to further increase poverty and inequality. There is a need to provide stronger support for reskilling and upskilling for at-risk or displaced workers. There is also a need to create incentives for investments in the markets and jobs of tomorrow; provide stronger safety nets for displaced workers in the midst of job transitions (World Economic Forum, 2020).

The IMF warns that much of the fiscal policy support, such as cash transfers and job retention support are gradually waning, with many having expired by the end of 2020. As Kristalina Georgieva states, "in order to reduce uncertainty and strengthen the bridge to recovery, it is important to avoid premature withdrawal of support" (Georgieva, 2020).

B.3 EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES

Prior to COVID-19, the LDCs made modest progress in increasing enrolment rates at the primary levels. According to the Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the IPoA (UN-OHRLLS, 2020), the proportion of children out of school in primary-age education dropped from 18.7 percent in 2011 to 17.7 percent in 2018. However, the out of school rate for LDCs remains double the world average of 8.1 percent. Furthermore, literacy rates improved, increasing from 57.6 percent in 2011 to 64.8 percent in 2018. However, more than 350 million people in the LDCs did not possess basic reading and writing skills. As argued by Azevedo et al., (2020), before the COVID-19 outbreak, the world was already tackling a learning crisis, with 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries (all LDCs fall under these two income categories) living in Learning Poverty—unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10.

COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented disruption of education provision globally. This not only affected the daily lives of students and their families but also led to learning losses and a potential increase in educational inequality. Even in developed countries, some studies conducted thus far find significant negative impacts. Maldonado & De Witte; 2020 found that students of the 2020 cohort in Belgium experienced significant learning losses in all tested subjects. They further found that schools with a more disadvantaged student population experience larger learning losses. In the US, Dorn et al., (2020) found that poor students are less likely to have access to high-quality remote learning or to a conducive learning environment, such as a quiet space with minimal distractions, devices they do not need to share, high-speed internet, and parental academic supervision. While these two studies are focused on developed countries, the situation in LDCs is even more challenging.

The situation is worse, particularly in the Sahel region where nationwide school closures due to COVID-19 came at a time when a very large number of schools had already been closed for several months because of severe insecurity, strikes, or climatic hazards. In general, COVID-19 is worsening the situation of education in Sub-Saharan Africa where, prior to the pandemic, 47 percent of the world's 258 million out-of-school children lived (30 percent due to conflict and emergency (UN, 2020b).

As found by some studies, including Azevedo et al., (2020) who conducted a multi-country assessment, COVID-19 could result in a loss of 0.6 years of schooling adjusted for quality, bringing down the effective years of basic schooling that children achieve during their schooling life from 7.9 years to 7.3 years. The combination of being out of school and the loss of family livelihoods caused by the pandemic may leave girls especially vulnerable and exacerbate exclusion and inequality — particularly for persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

However, the real concern is not just that a few months of learning will be lost in the short run, but that these losses will accumulate into large and permanent learning losses as many children fall behind during school closures and never catch up (Kaffenberger, 2020). Some lessons have been learned in previous health crises. The closure of schools was a common response in the different countries of West Africa that faced the Ebola crisis. A reduction in attendance after schools reopened was also documented with a 7 percent reduction in Guinea, 13 percent in Sierra Leone and 25 percent reduction in Liberia. In most cases, this was attributed to loss of household income (World Bank, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

Furthermore, the United Nations (2020b) Policy Brief highlights that the total number of children not returning to their education after the school closures is likely to be even greater. School closures make girls and young women more vulnerable to child marriage, early pregnancy, and gender-based violence—all of which decrease their likelihood of continuing their education.

In relation to the pandemic, Kaffenberger (2020) modelled post-COVID-19 learning scenarios using data from seven low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), among them Senegal

and Zambia, to estimate long-term learning loss. The author found that without mitigation, children could lose more than a full years' worth of learning from a three-month school closure because they will be behind the curriculum when they re-enter school and will fall further behind as time goes on. This reflects both time out of school and additional learning regression. The results of the study suggests that the long-term repercussions for children's learning could be devastating, with today's Grade 3 students losing as much as 1.5 years' worth of learning (or more) by the time they reach Grade 10 as a consequence of their time out of school. Governments can, however, introduce measures that mitigate some or all of these consequences. Some of these measures, including effective remediation efforts immediately upon return to school, could reduce long-term learning loss for the cohort of Grade 3 students by half. In addition, they will need to begin planning for reopening, putting in place the tools for remedial programmes and, if feasible, beginning to train teachers remotely. As they do so, they should consider how they can build programmes and train teachers in ways that can continue to produce benefits beyond the period immediately following reopening.

Conti et al., (2020) found that not attending school can have immediate adverse effects on children's learning and, more precisely, on the acquisition of foundational skills. Children who are recently out of school perform far behind children who continued to attend school. Second, the foundational reading skills gap between these two groups widens with age. For the 9–11 age group, in Madagascar, children who recently left school are 11 percentage points less likely to demonstrate foundational reading skills while in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the gap is about 1.5 percentage points. In Bangladesh, the gap is 17 percentage points. For older children, aged 12–14, the largest gap among the three LDCs in the sample was observed in Bangladesh where recently out-of-school children are 25 percentage points below those who continued to attend. The smallest gap is seen in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at 5 percentage points. The gap in Madagascar was about 21 percentage points.

Access to online and remote learning is a major challenge in LDCs. In 2019, Internet adoption in LDCs was at 19.1 percent (State of Broadband Report, 2020). Furthermore, skill gaps in using available online platforms and devices makes access to and use of online tools even more complex (UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, 2020) and amplifies the digital divide. As highlighted above, prior to the pandemic, many LDCs were facing a learning crisis. Now, with increased utilization of e-education and remote learning platforms that depend heavily on high-speed Internet access, learning inequalities are widening — between developed and developing countries and between the rich and the poor in the same country (see also Sharma, 2020).

After adjusting the percentage of primary school-age children facing school closures to account for households with access to the Internet, the effective out-of-school rate increases substantially everywhere, even under the optimistic assumption that all children with internet access will be able to continue their education online. Being out of school — even for a limited amount of time — is expected to have long-term impacts on learning, earning potential and wellbeing (Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Affairs, 2020; ILO, 2020).

In some LDCs such as Bhutan, the Government put its' focus on investment in technology and innovation, to put the economy back in its path to recovery and growth, and to create jobs of the future. E-learning technology and teaching was introduced and mobile vouchers to students without access to the internet have been provided to facilitate distance learning. In addition, teachers are encouraged to visit and teach students without access to e-learning and other facilities (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2020).

Given the challenge of reaching children with remote learning in poor countries, schools were reopening with fully in-person teaching and learning (Dreesen et al., 2020). In general, for many countries, immediate policy responses were aimed at ensuring continued curriculum-based learning through a range of remote learning modalities including online, TV/radio, paper-based take-home materials or other approaches (UNESCO; UNICEF; World Bank, 2020).

In addition, there are disparities for asset ownership that are useful for remote learning. For example, Dreesen et al., (2020) found that TV ownership rates among urban households were more than double that of rural households with the largest disparities appearing in sub-Saharan Africa. While rates of radio ownership between rural and urban households are more level across countries, the rates of radio ownership vary significantly. Taken together, and given large differences in access to technologies, these results show that no single delivery channel for remote learning is sufficient to reach all children and the rural poor are far more likely to be left out by technology-enabled remote learning. Nevertheless, the study by UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank (2020) found that among low- and lower-middle-income countries, radio was widely used and rated as very effective by about 16 percent and fairly effective by 65 percent of countries. Poorer countries relied more heavily on broadcast media, including radio (93 percent) and television (92 percent), to provide education content remotely during school closures, while the use of online platforms is lower, at 64 percent, likely due to low internet penetration in these environments.

In Timor-Leste, among those who watched education shows on television, 20.7 percent were in other municipalities, and 36.2 percent were in the Capital, Dili. This shows that there is a need to invest in e-education system to facilitate the learning processes for all students in Timor-Leste (Government of Timor-Leste, 2020).

Ultimately, there is need to take action to increase connectivity. This includes the provision of internet access at subsidized or zero cost, providing devices at lower cost to be used for educational purposes and access to online learning platforms through mobile phones (UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank; 2020). Initiatives like Giga, an ITU-UNICEF partnership aims to provide internet connectivity to schools in the developing world, including many LDCs.

Producing accessible digital and media resources based on the curriculum will not only allow a quicker response, but their use in ordinary times can also enrich learning opportunities for children in and out of school. Furthermore, it is important to build teachers' capacity to manage a remote 'virtual' classroom, improve their presentation techniques, train them to tailor follow-up sessions with caregivers and blend technology effectively into their lessons (Conto et al., 2020).

LDCs face additional structural challenges, which impacted on being able to effectively respond to the pandemic. For example, households with no access to electricity were unable to use the internet. The majority of households in rural areas do not have access to electricity. While access to electricity in the LDCs increased significantly, from 35 percent in 2011 to 52 percent in 2018, disparities persisted across countries and between rural and urban areas (see figure B.2).[22]

Investments in electricity and connectivity infrastructure will democratize access, increasing options for remote learning delivery, speeding up response during school closures and providing opportunities for working from home, whenever possible (see Conto et al., 2020).

Figure B.2: Access to electricity (percent)

Source: World Bank world development indicators.

[22] Access to renewable energy in LDCs is further discussed in Box II.

B.4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The consequences of COVID-19 pandemic have been devastating around the world, affecting not just the health sector but many other aspects of the social-economic fabric. Indeed, it is being shown to is likely to further increase poverty and inequality within and across countries.

It will be important to protect the already-existing poor people and those that have been pushed into poverty by the pandemic. Given the differences between those groups, an effective response calls for the adaptation of safety net programs designed to support both groups through the use of innovative targeting and delivery mechanisms, and for an economic recovery that reaches those in the informal sector in both rural and urban areas. This should include timely cash transfers as well as food or in-kind distributions. Specific measures should be tailored towards women workers with care responsibilities at home, families that may resort to child labour as a coping strategy, as well as other vulnerable subgroups (Sánchez-Páramo, 2020; FAO, 2020).

It will be important for LDCs to promote a job-rich recovery. However, this will require addressing key challenges, including increasing the proportion of quality, formal jobs; supporting vulnerable and hard-hit groups (such as women, youth and informal workers) and generating fairer labour market outcomes; and securing international solidarity and support (ILO, 2020). Additionally, avoiding premature withdrawal of policy support, such as unemployment benefits will help to build back better after the pandemic. Sustained international support is critical to tackle the economic and employment impacts of the pandemic in the LDCs. Far more bilateral and multilateral support and new financial facilities will be essential to help LDCs fund their responses at each of the different stages of the pandemic crisis (ILO, 2021). Workers, especially those at risk of losing jobs, will need to be supported so that they can reskill and upskill. There is also a need to prepare for the future of work, especially in light of on-going technological transformation.

Given the unprecedented changes in the school system brought about by COVID-19, there is a need to invest in e-education system so that all students everywhere can benefit. There is need to provide affordable internet access and devices to utilize during online learning. Furthermore, to avoid adverse long-term effects resulting from unexpected school closures, Governments must take strong efforts to minimize dropout rates — brought about by child labour, poverty, early marriages, etc. — once schools reopen. It will be essential to re-structure the education systems so that they become more resilient and sensitive to the diverse needs of children all across the world (Sharma, 2020).

REFERENCES

Akiwumi. P. and Valensisi (2020). When it rains it pours: COVID-19 exacerbates poverty risks in the poorest countries. https://unctad.org/news/when-it-rains-it-pours-covid-19-exacerbates-poverty-risks-poorest-countries

Azevedo, J. P., Hasan, A., Goldemberg, D., Iqbal, S. A., & Geven, K. (2020). Simulating the potential impacts of COVID19 school closures on schooling and learning outcomes: A set of global estimates (Policy Research Working Paper 9284). The World Bank. http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/798061592482682799/covid-and-education-June17-r6.pdf

Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Affairs (2020). How COVID-19 is changing the world: a statistical perspective Volume II. https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/covid19-report-ccsa_vol2.pdf

Conto, C. A., Akseer, S., Dreesen, T., Kamei, A., Mizunoya, S., & Rigole, A. (2020). COVID-19: Effects of School Closures on Foundational Skills and Promising Practices for Monitoring and Mitigating Learning Loss (Innocenti Working Paper No. 2020-13). UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1144-covid19-effects-of-school-closures-on-foundational-skills-and-promising-practices.html

Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2020). COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime (McKinsey & Company Public Sector Practice). McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Industries/Public%20and%20Social%20Sector/Our%20Insights/COVID-19%20and%20student%20learning%20in%20the%20United%20States%20The%20hurt%20could%20last%20a%20lifetime/COVID-19-and-student-learning-in-the-United-States-FINAL.pdf

Dreesen, T., Akseer, S., Brossard, M., Dewan, P., Giraldo, J., Kamei, A., Mizunoya, S., & Ortiz, J. (2020). Promising practices for equitable remote learning: Emerging lessons from COVID-19 education responses in 127 countries (Innocenti Research Briefs no. 2020-10). UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10%20CL.pdf

FAO (2020). "Impact of COVID-19 on informal workers", 07 April, 2020. http://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1270457/

Georgieva. K. (2020). Continued Strong Policy Action to Combat Uncertainty. IMF Blog. https://blogs.imf.org/2020/11/19/continued-strong-policy-action-to-combat-uncertainty/

Government of Bangladesh (2020). Inputs of National Focal Points of LDCs in the Asia-Pacific on Response to COVID-19 and Way Forward: Bangladesh Context.

Government of the Republic of Timor-Leste (2020). Q&A on the impact of Covid-19 Pandemic in Timor-Leste. Submitted to the Committee for Development Policy in UN DESA.

ILO (2020). ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Fifth edition Updated estimates and analysis. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/–dgreports/–dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_749399.pdf

ILO (2020a). ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work, 6th edition. Updated estimates and analysis. 23 September 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/–dgreports/–dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_755910.pdf

ILO (2020b). ILO: As job losses escalate, nearly half of global workforce at risk of losing livelihoods. http://ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_743036/lang--en/index.html

ILO (2021). COVID-19: Tackling the Jobs Crisis in the Least Developed Countries. https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS_766463/lang–en/index.htm

Kaffenberger, M. (2020). 'Modeling the Long-Run Learning Impact of the COVID-19 Learning Shock: Actions to (More Than) Mitigate Loss.' RISE Insight Series. https://riseprogramme.org/publications/modeling-long-run-learning-impact-covid-19-learning-shock-actions-more-mitigate-loss

Maldonado, J. E., & De Witte, K. (2020). The effect of school closures on standardized student test outcomes (KU Leuven Department of Economics Discussion Paper Series DPS 20.17). Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. https://feb.kuleuven.be/research/economics/ces/documents/DPS/2020/dps2017.pdf

McGregor (2008). Wellbeing, Development and Social Change in Thailand, Thammasat Economic Journal, Vol.26, No.2.

Gough. I., J. Allister McGregor. A. J and Camfield. L (2006). Wellbeing in Developing Countries: Conceptual Foundations of the WeD Programme. ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries.

Royal Government of Bhutan (2020). National Experience in COVID-19 Response- Bhutan. Gross National Happiness Commission. Submitted to UN-OHRLLS.

Sánchez-Páramo. C. (2020). The new poor are different: Who they are and why it matters. https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/new-poor-are-different-who-they-are-and-why-it-matters

Sharma. N. (2020). Torn safety nets: How COVID-19 has exposed huge inequalities in global education. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/torn-safety-nets-shocks-to-schooling-in-developing-countries-during-coronavirus-crisis/

State of Broadband Report 2020: Geneva: International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020.

Strohm. R. and Goldberg. N (2020). Key Decisions for COVID-19 Social Protection in Low-and Middle-Income Countries: Who Benefits and How? Policy Brief. Indicators for Poverty Action. http://www.poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/publications/COVID-19-Social-Protection-Policy-Brief_September-2020.pdf

UNESCO; UNICEF; World Bank (2020). What Have We Learnt?: Overview of Findings from a Survey of Ministries of Education on National Responses to COVID-19. Paris, New York, Washington D.C.: UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374702

UN (2020a). The Sustainable Development Goals Report. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf

UN (2020b). Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond. https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf

UN-OHRLLS (2018). State of the LDCs 2018. Reducing Vulnerabilities and Strengthening Resilience in LDCs. https://www.un.org/ohrlls/sites/www.un.org.ohrlls/files/state-of-the-ldcs-2018.pdf

UN-OHRLLS (2020). Report of the Secretary-General. Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020. https://undocs.org/A/75/72%20#un

UN-WOMEN (2020). From insights to action: Gender equality in the wake of COVID-19. Annexes. From insights to action: Gender equality in the wake of COVID-19 | Digital library: Publications | UN Women – Headquarters

World Bank (2016a). Republic of Guinea Socioeconomic Impact of Ebola using Mobile Phone Survey, Report No: ACS18659. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/24724/Socioeconomic00ne0survey0in0Guinea.pdf?sequence=1

World Bank (2016b). The Socio-Economic Impacts of Ebola in Liberia. Results from a High Frequency Cell Phone Survey., Report No: 96196. https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Poverty%20documents/Socio-Economic%20Impacts%20of%20Ebola%20in%20Liberia%2C%20April%2015%20(final).pdf

World Bank (2016c). The Socio-Economic Impacts of Ebola in Sierra Leone. Results from a High Frequency Cell Phone Survey. Report No: 97392. http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/597411493657060331/pdf/114701-WP-P151624-PUBLIC-ROUND-1-Socio-Economic-Impacts-of-Ebola-in-Sierra-Leone-Jan-12-final.pdf

World Economic Forum (2020). The Future of Jobs Report 2020 http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2020.pdf

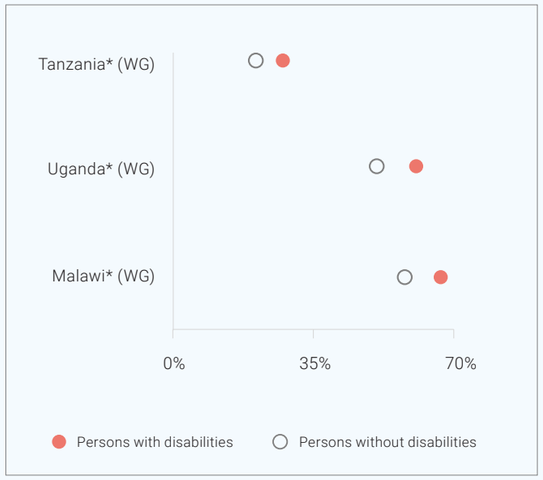
Box I: Effects of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities

An estimated 1 billion people live with a disability globally, and around 80 percent of those are living in developing countries (World Bank, 2011).

Very limited data is available on persons with disabilities living in LDCs. A small, but growing body of empirical evidence from selected LDCs show, even before the pandemic, persons with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty. In addition, the disadvantages they experience extend to many sectors, including education, employment, health care, nutrition, and access to water, sanitation, energy, information and justice.[23]

Persons with disabilities, particularly those in LDCs are likely to be among the worst affected due to attitudinal, environmental, and institutional barriers that are magnified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis is likely to increase the risk of poverty, experience acute food insecurity, higher rates of violence, neglect, and abuse among persons with disabilities. These inequalities are heightened for women and girls with disabilities who are often subjected to double discrimination due to their gender and disability status.

Figure I.1: Percentage of households with and without persons with disabilities living under the international poverty line (US$1.90 a day) in 3 LDCs



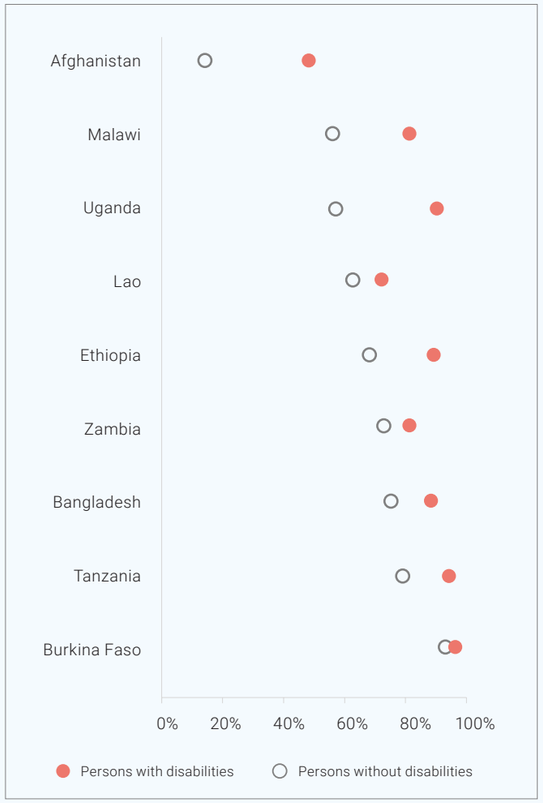
Source: UN (2018).

A comparative study across 22 countries, of which 9 were LDCs, using multidimensional poverty rates, show consistently higher rate of poverty in households with disabilities.

The study also found poverty gaps were largest in districts with the poorest infrastructure and access to healthcare services, suggesting that overall accessibility and service delivery has a critical role to play in improving the conditions of persons with disabilities.

The persistent poverty gap between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities in LDCs will be widened by the impacts of the pandemic unless the response to address the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 are disability-inclusive.

Figure I.2: Multidimensional poverty rates, for persons with and without disabilities, in 9 least developed countries, in 2002–2014



Source: UN (2018).

[23] UN General Assembly, Report of the Secretary General on Inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities, 20 July 2020, A/75/186, available at https://undocs.org/A/75/187

Impact of poverty

Persons with disabilities are less likely to be employed in the formal sector, and therefore have less access to social protection systems and decrease their resilience to loss of income during the pandemic. The majority of persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities are employed in the informal sector, which is significantly impacted by lockdown and curfews, leading to loss of their only sources of income.

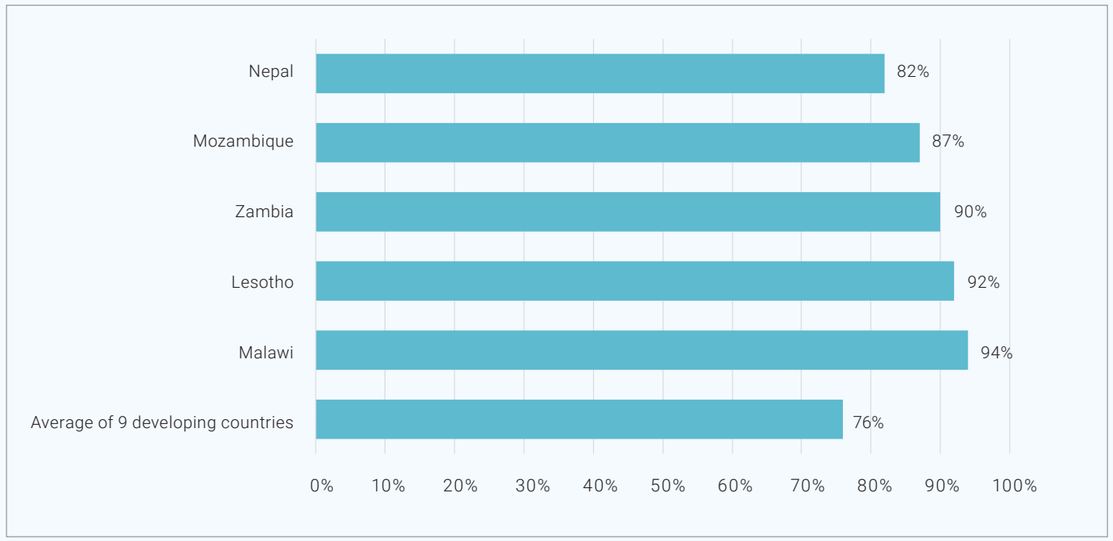
Households with disabilities are likely to have fewer assets and coping mechanisms to absorb shocks. They are also less likely to be able to afford to stockpile food and medicines to counter suspension of services. Extended lockdowns are likely to increase their vulnerabilities, including food insecurity, shortage of medicine, affordability of hygiene products to protect from COVID-19.

The lack of income represents a disproportionate burden on persons with disabilities and their households, which typically face extra costs related to disability (accessible housing and equipment, assistive devices, specific goods, and services), pulling them more rapidly into poverty.[24]

Social protection is critical to reducing vulnerability and exposure to poverty. While coverage is low in most LDCs for all people, social protection services remain largely inaccessible to persons with disabilities. Disability targeted benefits are even more scarce with only 1 percent of persons with severe disabilities receiving such benefits in low-income countries (UN, 2018).

The 2018 UN Disability Report presents evidence from 9 developing countries, including 5 LDCs (Malawi, Lesotho, Zambia, Mozambique and Nepal), indicating that on average, among people with disabilities who needed welfare services, 76 percent were not able to receive these services (with higher rates for the LDCs with available data) (see Figure I.3). The Report further notes that access to social protection programmes, even disability-targeted ones, has been shown to be restricted by a variety of barriers. Persons with disabilities are not always informed of social protection programmes in their area and benefit packages offered may not be adapted to their needs.

Figure I.3: Percentage of people who needed but did not receive welfare services in 5 LDCs



Source: UN (2018).

[24] https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

There is very limited evidence on disability-targeted social assistance in response to COVID-19. According to the IMF, in Lesotho Public Assistance has also been expanded for three months to add vulnerable groups such as children, elderly, disabled, and those working in the informal sector.[25] The Public Assistance Program is Lesotho's oldest safety net program, and it includes two components: permanent assistance and temporary assistance, which, is designed to provide assistance up to six months (World Bank, 2016). Similarly, São Tomé and Príncipe announced plans to expand social assistance such as World Bank supported cash-transfer program, and increased support to vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities.[26]

Access to healthcare

Even before the pandemic, 80 percent of persons with disabilities living in countries with lower levels of GDP per capita report poorer health compared with 20 percent in countries with highest levels of income (UN, 2018). Persons with disabilities face a greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and higher mortality rates because of underlying health conditions as well disability-based discrimination in accessing healthcare services, which have been amplified during the pandemic.

Persons with disabilities in LDCs are less likely to have access to information on COVID-19 in accessible formats, PPE tailored to their impairments, access to technology, as well as assistive technologies needed for telehealth, making them more vulnerable to COVID-19. For instance, given that masks make it impossible to read lips or see facial expressions, deaf and hard of hearing persons will benefit better from face shields (UN, 2020).

Persons with disabilities, especially those in rural populations with lack of access to water and sanitation may be also at a disadvantage in practicing sanitary protection measures for COVID-19.

Emerging evidence also suggests an increase in mental health illnesses associated with anxiety, lockdown and isolation putting an additional strain on mental healthcare systems.

The WHO has issued disability-inclusive guidelines that are in line with international human rights conventions.

Disability inclusion is central to the 2030 Agenda to leave no-one behind. In May 2020, the UN Secretary General issued a brief on disability-inclusive response to COVID-19 outlining the overacting areas for action.

A disability-inclusive response to COVID-19 will increase the resilience of healthcare systems and help address persistent barriers to access to healthcare for persons with disabilities in LDCs.

Recommendations

As persons with disabilities are most severely affected by COVID-19, including access to services and opportunities, their interests need to be central to the response. Thus, the following actions are recommended:

- Strengthen national policies and programmes to mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities in COVID-19 response and recovery.
- Promote disability-inclusion in existing and expanded social protection programs including through targeted support and benefit schemes to account for additional costs associated with disability.
- Remove barriers to enrolling in social protection schemes including special schemes established to address the impacts of the pandemic, such as lack of accessible information, absence of documentation, lack of accessibility of grant offices, unclear disability eligibility criteria and stigma associated with certain types of disabilities, particularly mental illnesses.
- Promote policies and practices to eliminate negative disability-bias in access to medical treatments, including triage decision-making and access to testing for COVID-19 and vaccinations, when available.
- Consult with organisations of persons with disabilities, in particular with organizations of women and girls with disabilities, in all stages of COVID-19 response and recovery.
- Ensure more equitable and safe provision of basic water and sanitation services to persons with disabilities, including in rural areas.
- Seize opportunities to promote telehealth, online education and telecommuting by increasing accessibility and affordability of technology and assistive devices for persons with disabilities in LDCs.

[25] https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#S
[26] https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#S

REFERENCES

World Health Organization & World Bank. (2011). World report on disability 2011. World Health Organization. https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/44575

UN General Assembly (2020). Report of the Secretary General on Inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities, 20 July 2020, A/75/186. https://undocs.org/A/75/187

OHCHR (2020). Human Rights at the heart of response, COVID-19 and persons with disabilities. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

UN (2018). Disability and Development Report: realizing the SDGs by, for and with persons with disabilities. https://social.un.org/publications/UN-Flagship-Report-Disability-Final.pdf

IMF (2020b). Policy responses to COVID-19 - Policy Tracker. https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19

World Bank (2016). Social Protection and Labor Global Practice Africa, Report No: PAD1377. http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/530181468185959439/pdf/PAD1377-PAD-P151442-IDA-R2016-0101-1-Box394887B-OUO-9.pdf

United Nation (2020). Policy Brief: A disability-inclusive response to COVID-19. https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/05/sg_policy_brief_on_persons_with_disabilities_final.pdf

Banks LM, Davey C, Shakespeare T, Kuper H. (2021). Disability-inclusive responses to COVID-19: Lessons learnt from research on social protection in low- and middle-income countries. World Dev. 2021;137:105178. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105178. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7455235/

C. EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON FOOD SECURITY, NUTRITION, AND AGRICULTURE IN THE LDCs

An analysis of the food and agriculture sector in the LDCs shows the interconnectedness of health, poverty, and economic development. The demographic profile and structural features of the economy of the LDCs make agriculture a sector with extraordinary growth potential. Increasing productivity in agriculture is crucial for poverty reduction and often benefits the poorest and most vulnerable (Christiaensen et al., 2018). Agricultural growth can also positively impact other areas of human development, such as health and nutrition. Rising agricultural productivity can also reduce poverty by freeing up labor for non-farm agricultural activities or non-agricultural activities. In many LDCs, where food is primarily locally produced and consumed, increasing productivity growth in agriculture can facilitate the transfer of labor to non-farm activities without necessarily increasing food insecurity to poor or vulnerable populations.

The severe lockdown measures imposed by high income countries to contain the pandemic illustrates the importance of strong social safety nets that provide protection against severe disruptions caused by these measures. With extremally weak social protection systems, the disruptions caused by the pandemic have increased the cost and impact the availability of food in the LDCs. In the absence of social protection schemes, hunger and malnutrition will increase dramatically in the LDCs, particularly in countries that were already facing a difficult situation prior the pandemic.

Countries affected by conflict, natural disasters, or other humanitarian crises face additional challenges. They require special and additional support in the short term to prevent the risk of starvation and severe food insecurity. Development and trading partners, multilateral organizations, and other relevant actors can support the efforts of LDCs to set the basis of agricultural development and enhancement in productivity conducive to poverty reduction and sustainable development.

COVID-19 is likely accelerating worrisome trends in the LDCs. Before the pandemic, the number of people suffering from hunger in the LDCs was already rising, increasingly placing LDCs as the locus of hunger and undernutrition. In the Solomon Islands, COVID-19 mitigation measures have reduced agricultural production, food and incomes and dietary diversity declined (Lese et al., 2021). In Ethiopia, dietary diversity declined in poorer households (IFPRI, 2020).

Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in total population pre-pandemic

(percent) (3-year average) (age 69)