

Food Security in the Covid-19 Era

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Natural disasters and calamities have greatly impacted the human race in multiple ways, causing colossal loss of life and property, collapse of societal functions, stress, economic crisis, and environmental degradation, though the misery inflicted by such catastrophes throughout the ages might not have been equal to all segments of the people. Needless to say, the poor and the disadvantaged—rather than the rich—continue to face the brunt of calamities (like climate change) which the world is confronted with, and the resultant economic and food crises (Balasubramanian, 2018). At present, the Covid-19 outbreak and the consequent lockdown have crippled socio-economic activities, depriving the poor people of their livelihood and cultural space. The global economy has taken a severe beating following the eruption of the pandemic and the attendant stringent containment measures for the past six to seven months in the United States, European Union, India, China, and so on. This has had a debilitating effect on the labour force, especially those in the unorganised sector drawn mostly from the marginalised sections of society. These vulnerable communities are drastically affected in terms of loss of employment, income, and adequate food consumption.

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Lockdown and the most vulnerable

In India, the more-than-three-month-long nationwide curfew intended to contain the pandemic brought to a standstill all social and economic activities. Not only children and the elderly, all working people remained homebound. There was an exodus of migrants, from cities, who marched in thousands towards their native villages, with little or inadequate cash reserves in their hands. It is still not certain whether they will return to the cities even after the pandemic is over. While it is true that the extended lockdown has helped in arresting the furious spread of the virus

to a certain extent, it has disrupted the livelihood of ordinary and daily wage workers in rural as well as urban regions.

Workers in the informal sector are mostly daily-wage earners, who are less likely to have formal work arrangements, decent working conditions, and adequate social security. Further, since they remain voiceless without any effective representation by trade unions or similar organisations, they are the most vulnerable to the economic shocks arising out of the Covid-19 pandemic. Leave alone job security, they do not have any kind of statutory benefits, such as insurance cover and provident fund, from the employers, and may not have lump-sum personal savings. For instance, migrants account for more than 70% of the workforce engaged in

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Kijin Kim, Sunae Kim, & Cyn-Young Park. 2020, June. *Food security in Asia and the Pacific amid the COVID-19 pandemic* (ADB Briefs No. 139). Asian Development Bank.

Kenya Evelyn. 2020, April 8. "It's a racial justice issue": Black Americans are dying in greater numbers from Covid-19. *The Guardian*.

Sandro Galea. 2020, March 9. *The poor and marginalized will be the hardest hit by coronavirus*. *Scientific American* (Blog post).

Shwetlana Sabarwal, Nistha Sinha, & Mayra Buvinic. n.d. *The global financial crisis: Assessing vulnerability for women and children*.

non-agricultural sectors, and they do not have any written job contract. Worse, 55% of them are not eligible for paid leave while 50% do not have any social security benefits (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2019). The informal sector in the country employs 415 million workers, which is about 90% of the total workforce (Jha, 2016). It covers millions of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, construction and road workers, shepherds, fisherfolk, weavers and artisans, forest gatherers, workers in manufacturing (factories and workshops), housemaids, street vendors, transport workers, hairdressers, and waste collectors (Chen, 2020). Once the lockdown was announced, all such workers have been rendered unemployed, which has resulted in complete loss of income leading to reduction in affordability and accessibility to food items. Estimates indicate that the income of such workers decreased by 22% in the first month of the pandemic spread, resulting in increased poverty rate from 22% to 36% (International Labour Organization, 2020; Kim et al., 2020).

Studies indicate that the working class, the poor, and the marginalised communities would be the hardest hit by Covid-19 (Evelyn, 2020; Galea, 2020). Ringing alarm bells, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has also warned that the number of people facing food crises across world could double by the end of 2020. A study (Sabarwal et al., n.d.) had given a disturbing forecast that any economic crisis could claim 2.4 lakh infant deaths in the developing countries. This pandemic has not left untouched women and children. Women and children in poorer families are more likely to suffer from lack of food and malnutrition, as the containment

Clare Wenham, Julia Smith, & Rosemary Morgan. 2020. COVID-19: The gendered impacts of the outbreak. *The Lancet*, 395(10227), 846–848.

Dala T. Korkoyah, Jr, & Francis F. Wreh. 2015. *Ebola impact revealed: An assessment of the differing impact of the outbreak on the women and men in Liberia* (Report). UN Women, Oxfam International, Liberia Ministry of Gender and Development, Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, and Liberia WASH Consortium

Laura Sochas, Andrew Amos Channon, & Sara Nam. 2017. Counting indirect crisis-related deaths in the context of a low-resilience health system: The case of maternal and neonatal health during the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone. *Health Policy and Planning*, 32(suppl_3), iii32-iii39.

Joseph Glauber, David Laborde, Will Martin, & Rob Vos. 2020, March 27. COVID-19: Trade restrictions are worst possible response to safeguard food security (Blog post). International Food Policy Research Institute.

Mahmoud F. Seleiman, Shaimaa Selim, Bushra Ahmed Alhammad, Basmah M. Alharbi, & Fernando Cezar Juliatti. 2020. Will novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic impact agriculture, food security and animal sectors? *Bioscience Journal*, 36(4), 1315–1326.

steps are expected to result in less care for children and women given the necessity to divert resources towards health-related concerns and the emergency response both at household and national levels (Wenham et al., 2020). Similar problems have been reported during previous epidemics, including the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (Korkoya & Wreh, 2015; Sochas et al., 2017). It is also noted that they are the major contributors to the total family income in the households of the poorest of poor.

Covid-19, food supply chain, and dietary pattern

Coming close on the heels of an economic slowdown, the pandemic and the continuing lockdown in many states have caused a food crisis. On the supply side, there is a collapse of the food supply chain right from the local market to the international trade arena. For instance, farmers and traders are unable to move food products from the farmlands to the ultimate consumer in view of the many obstacles, including barriers on movement of labour and vehicles even at local and regional levels. Along with the restrictions on movement, the limited demand for food items from households, hotels, and restaurants have dampened the current harvest season as well as the sowing/planting operations for the upcoming cropping season. Given this grim reality, agricultural activities have shrunk as farmers are not ready to burn their fingers. As an

immediate consequence of this, we might witness a shortage in the regular supply of food products in terms of variety and quantity, which might turn acute in the post-Covid-19 period. As almost all countries are affected by Covid-19, there are already difficulties in the import of food products (Glauber, 2020; Seleiman et al., 2020), especially pulses and edible oils in India. According to the Solvent Extractors' Association of India, the total edible oil imports in April 2020 decreased about 34% when compared to last year's import in the same month. It is worth noting that these two are the major food items, rich in protein and fat, accounting for a large chunk of India's imports. Hence, the curbs at present on the movement, both at local and international levels, have led to a disruption of the entire food supply chain in the country—from production to processing, packaging, transporting, marketing—giving rise to higher food prices, inaccessibility, and inadequate consumption of healthy food products. During such a climate of volatility and uncertainty, there is every possibility of stockpiling and

hoarding of essential and durable food commodities, particularly pulses, in anticipation of higher prices, short supply, and unavailability in the days ahead. This would distort market dynamics, causing hyperinflation in the food sector. To understand the magnitude of this problem, let us take the price fluctuation of rice, the staple diet in South Asia. Retail price of rice rose by 10%–20% on an average in January–April in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Significantly, international rice price too shot up by 16% against the 2019 average, while wheat price went up slightly (by about 2%) as of end-May (Kim et al., 2020).

Kijin Kim, Sunae Kim, & Cyn-Young Park. 2020, June. *Food security in Asia and the Pacific amid the COVID-19 pandemic* (ADB Briefs No. 139). Asian Development Bank.

As far as India is concerned, street vendors and small retailers are the primary source of supplying fruits and vegetables to poor people. Since the business of these two bottom-most categories of traders is the worst affected by the lockdown, fruit and vegetable sales would come down considerably, which in turn can be expected to substantially reduce the intake of multivitamins and micronutrients by poor people.

On the consumption side, the Covid-19 shutdown is witnessing a sharp fall in the purchasing power of the poor, resulting either in a reduction in the size and number of meals or in foregoing food for the whole day. If the situation becomes worse, people might even consume wild foods, immature crops, seed stocks, and items which are not part of their normal diet. We have seen such consumption across states in the past. Now, due to loss of income and disruption in the food supply chain, nutritious foods (such as vegetables and fruits), livestock products (like milk, meat, and eggs), and fish products have either become inaccessible or expensive, and consequently the poor tend to buy less and less of such food. Similarly, when staple food items, such as rice, wheat, and pulses, become more expensive, people are more likely to reduce consumption of these essential commodities without any

Timothy Robertson, Emily D. Carter, Victoria B. Chou, Angela R. Stegmuller, Bianca D. Jackson, Yvonne Tam, Talata Sawadogo-Lewis, & Neff Walker. 2020. *Early estimates of the indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal and child mortality in low-income and middle-income countries: A modelling study*. *The Lancet Global Health*, 8(7), e901–e908.

option to substitute them. Moreover, with schools remaining closed, millions of poor school children are deprived of free noon meals provided by the government, on which they relied for their basic nutrition. If access to food gets snapped, a natural corollary would be an increase in child mortality, which will have a devastating effect (Robertson et al., 2020). Ultimately, the decline in the quality of diet increases problems associated with malnutrition.

Malnutrition and Covid-19

Fara Naja & Rena Hamadeh. 2020. *Nutrition amid the COVID-19 pandemic: A multi-level framework for action*. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

Healthy diet has a profound effect on the immune system, greatly reducing disease susceptibility (Naja & Hamadeh, 2020). Inadequate intake of iron, zinc, and vitamins A, C, E, B6, and

Michael Gleeson, David C. Nieman, & Bente K. Pedersen. 2004. Exercise, nutrition and immune function. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 22(1), 115–125.

Food and Agriculture Organization. 2019. *The state of food security and nutrition in the world*.

Mikiko Watanabe, Renata Risi, Dario Tuccinardi, Claudia J. Baquero, Silvia Manfrini, & Lucio Gnessi. 2020. Obesity and SARS-CoV-2: A population to safeguard. *Diabetes/Metabolism Research and Reviews*, e3325.

Food and Agriculture Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development, & World Food Programme. 2015. *The state of food insecurity in the world 2015. Meeting the 2015 international hunger targets: Taking stock of uneven progress*. Food and Agriculture Organization.

Henry E. Mark, Lisa A. Houghton, Rosalind S. Gibson, Eva Monterrosa, & Laus Kraemer. 2016. Estimating dietary micronutrient supply and the prevalence of inadequate intakes from national food balance sheets in the South Asia region. *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 25(2), 368–376.

National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau. 2012. *Diet and nutritional status of rural population, prevalence of hypertension & diabetes among adults and infants & young child feeding practices: Report of third repeat survey* (Technical Report No. 26). National Institute of Nutrition, Indian Council of Medical Research.

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. 2016. *National family health survey 4, 2015–16*. Government of India.

David Atkin. 2016. The caloric costs of culture: Evidence from Indian migrants. *American Economic Review*, 106(4), 1144–1181.

B12 leads to deterioration in the functioning of the immune system (Gleeson et al., 2004), increasing the risk of getting infected. Food insecurity results in chronic undernutrition, which makes children vulnerable to infectious diseases, causing maternal anaemia in pregnant women, obesity, and the development of non-communicable diseases, including Type 2 diabetes (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019) and in due course turning them into a hunting ground of Covid-19 and poor diagnosis against it (Watanabe et al., 2020). Insufficient nutrient intake would result in less immunity and higher risk to Covid-19 in the short run and weaker health, reduced well-being, and inequity in the long run, indicative of higher level of poverty. Hence, ensuring availability of adequate food and affordability to purchase nutrient rich food items is important not only for enhancing people's healthy diet and strengthening the immune system for long life but also, as an immediate goal, to ward off epidemics like Covid-19.

Although India has made significant progress in reducing poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition over the past four decades, the country continues to grapple with a high level of malnutrition among the population, resulting in underweight, stunting, wasting, and anaemia. According to a 2015 report of the Food and Agriculture Organization, 5% of pregnant women are anaemic (iron deficient), around 33% of women have low body mass index, and a substantial number of children under age 5 years are stunted (38%), wasted (21%), and underweight (35.7%). Research findings reveal that the vast majority of people with micronutrient deficiencies live in low-income, South Asian countries, including India (Mark et al., 2016). A recent survey on micronutrient intake in select states of India showed that the proportion of preschool children who did not meet at least 50% of the Indian Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for calcium, vitamin A, riboflavin, and vitamin C ranged from 51%–82%, while the corresponding figure for adolescents was 52%–85% (National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau, 2012). The intake of micronutrients, such as iron, vitamin A, riboflavin, vitamin C, and folic acid was less than 50% of RDA in 51%–83% of pregnant women (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2016). Another study (Atkin, 2016) clearly indicated that

Timothy Roberton, Emily D. Carter, Victoria B. Chou, Angela R. Stegmuller, Bianca D. Jackson, Yvonne Tam, Talata Sawadogo-Lewis, & Neff Walker. 2020. Early estimates of the indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal and child mortality in low-income and middle-income countries: A modelling study. *The Lancet Global Health*, 8(7), e901–e908.

migrant households in India consume fewer calories per person, when compared to non-migrant households in the same village.

While India is already struggling with significant poverty, inequality, and poor nutrition, a further economic crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to be disastrous, resulting in the denial of access to diverse and nutritious diet among informal sector workers (Roberton et al., 2020). We can see subjectively the cumulative effect of the pandemic combined with existing malnutrition problems. Thus, this pandemic would prove to be a major hurdle in the way of achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 2 of reduced poverty, hunger, and malnutrition in India by 2030.

Food security measures

Before Covid-19, over four decades, a number of measures were taken to eliminate the problems of food and nutrient insecurity, by increasing production, accessibility, and affordability. Such interventions included the Green Revolution and its associated technologies, advancements and developments in irrigation, and the introduction of various social security programmes, like Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Balwadis (childcare centres), Tamil Nadu's Mid-day Meal Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, and POSHAN Abhiyaan, aimed at improving the health and nutritional status of vulnerable sections. The recent National Food Security Act, 2013, too ensures accessibility of major food items (5 kg per person per month) at a highly subsidised price (per kg rice at ₹3, wheat at ₹2, and coarse cereals at ₹1), covering around 75% of rural and 50% of urban population. Some states follow their own policy in this respect. For instance, Tamil Nadu has adopted universal public distribution system (PDS) and provides free rice to all households, irrespective of socio-economic status.

Amidst Covid-19, the union government took several steps to address the sudden food crisis (arising due to the outbreak) with the prime focus on the millions engaged in the informal sector. According to reports, more than 37,900 relief camps were set up for migrant workers, serving food to more than 16 million people. In all, about 1.65 million workers have been accommodated and fed so far. In addition, 5 kg of rice and wheat and 1 kg of dal were supplied. Thus about ₹2.3 trillion and

Bishow Parajuli. 2020, May 18. How India can improve its food security after the pandemic passes. *The Wire*.

75 million tonnes of cereals were allocated additionally to various food security schemes such as TPDS, midday meals, and ICDS (Parajuli, 2020).

Apart from the central government, state governments have followed their own food security measures as an immediate response to the virus scare. For instance, the Government of Tamil Nadu extended a cash dole of ₹1,000 each to every ration cardholder, besides supplying free rice, dal, oil, and sugar free to all eligible households. Government of Kerala provides a food basket containing rice, wheat, sugar, salt, edible oil, pulses, spices, and non-food items (such as soap and sanitisers). The Government of Delhi gives 1.5 times more ration to families entitled under the PDS.

Moreover, some states offer cooked meals at highly subsidised prices through canteens (Tamil Nadu's 'Amma Canteen', Rajasthan's 'Anna Poorna Rasoi', and Delhi's 'Aam Aadmi Canteen'), which sustained the vulnerable, including migrants, unskilled labourers, and poor students, even during the lockdown. Tamil Nadu's Amma Canteen, launched in 2013 and run by women's self-help groups, is a pioneer in this regard. At an Amma Canteen, one can get Idly at ₹1 and variety rice (curd rice, tamarind rice, or sambar rice) at ₹3–₹5. Providing breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day throughout the year, except on specified holidays, these canteens remain the lifeline for those who are outside the ration card system and other social security programmes as well as migrants who are unable to avail the PDS food materials.

Despite significant efforts by governments to ensure availability and accessibility of food items, many outreach programmes have not been implemented, or have been implemented poorly, due to implementation difficulties in the lockdown. For instance, as all schools remain closed amidst the pandemic, providing midday meals for poor children under ICDS has been disrupted and stopped in most places, and worsened the undernutrition among children. Further, simply providing food grains does not ensure nutrition, especially for children and women, and pregnant and lactating mothers. They need food items which are rich in micronutrients and vitamins for a nutritious and healthy diet. Almost all food security programmes include cereals, such as rice and wheat, but most of the nutrient-rich food items are not covered under any PDS programme. Specifically, the role of pulses, millets, and other coarse grains is either meagre or completely absent in most of the food security programmes under the PDS. Similar is the case of fruits, vegetables, and other food items. Hitherto, there has been no policy option for the distribution of fish and livestock products, such as meat and milk products, through the PDS. Hence, the supply chain for many food products not covered in the PDS might be the most vulnerable to the lockdown, raising questions of nutrition insecurity and malnutrition problems.

Apart from these, the current PDS has been criticised for problems in its implementation. First, the current PDS benefits only local people, ignoring migrant workers. Recently, even before the outbreak of the pandemic, some initiatives, such

as the ‘One Nation, One Card’ (ONOC) programme, were introduced by the union government to tackle the issue of food insecurity among migrants. However, ONOC has been confronted with a few bottlenecks at the level of implementation, like managerial problems with respect to the states’ role and rights in PDS distribution in the event of adopting this system. Previously, there was no specific programme concerning food and nutritional security of the family members of unorganised and migrant workers. Second, identifying the exact beneficiary for availing any food security programme under PDS is an important issue. Until now, the beneficiaries (e.g., the number of family members) were identified based on the 2011 population census. Considering the increase in population since then, there is

Jean Drèze. 2020, March 28.
Excess stocks of the Food Corporation of India must be released to the poor.
The Indian Express.

Sohini Sengupta & Manish K. Jha. 2020.
Social policy, COVID-19 and impoverished migrants: Challenges and prospects in locked down India. *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, 2(2), 152–172.

a possibility of having left out a large chunk of the poor, who need government assistance in relief efforts like food supply against the pandemic (Drèze, 2020; Sengupta & Jha, 2020). Already, some states like Tamil Nadu have creditably adopted universal PDS in supplying food grains. Third, the current PDS has been responsible for huge wastage of food grains while stocking, transporting, and so on. All these are expected to remain and aggravate the problems of undernourishment, malnutrition, and poverty in the country.

Conclusion and policy measures

Food production, trade, commerce, and the supply chain are in a precarious situation, with the economy hurtling down due to Covid-19 containment measures. These are having adverse consequences on the dietary pattern and nutrient intake of the people. If proper precautionary measures are not undertaken to address the issues of food and nutrient security associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, there would be a spillover effect on poverty, inequality, education, health services, and production assets of the poor in the aftermath period of the pandemic, which will threaten the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Therefore, it is time to strengthen our food supply system through appropriate policy measures, to protect the disadvantaged people not only during the pandemic crisis but all the time.

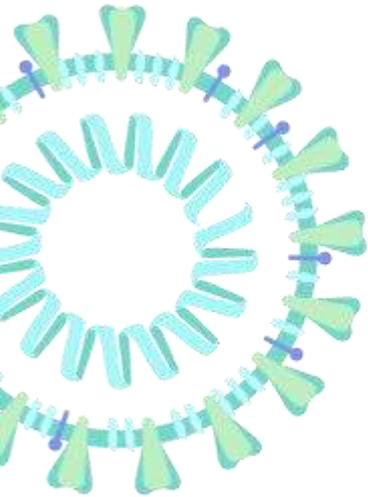
Short-term measures

1. Monitoring the proper functioning of labour and food markets is important, to identify a crisis as and when it occurs as well as to ascertain the victims of the crisis and the needy. The labour and food markets are considered to be the key factors impinging upon livelihood, poverty level, food security, nutrition, and health of the vast citizenry, specifically, migrants and daily-wage earners.

2. The sudden lockdown created a huge mismatch between supply and demand for food materials, specifically for perishables. The prices of vegetables varied across markets, and within 2–3 days, prices of perishables oscillated drastically. This was because of lack of proper distribution arrangements during the distress situation, that is, the frequent closing of permanent markets and opening of new market places in cities as well as villages. This affected producers and consumers. To avoid such pitfalls in distribution, we need an immediate forum comprising all stakeholders, including farmers, traders, street vendors, and marketing agencies supplying food items at the municipal or panchayat level. NGOs and volunteers can be entrusted to estimate food availability and demand for a region and a family. Accordingly, a food basket containing cereals, pulses, edible oil, milk products, fruits and vegetables, salt, bread, and other nutritional and health-related products should be distributed to every family, irrespective of socio-economic status, regularly (at intervals) during the entire period of the pandemic and containment, so that the full efficiency of containment measures can be achieved by keeping people in their homes (rather than roaming around the streets and city for their basic needs). Such a mechanism would support the government’s efforts and that of the civil society in achieving food security.
3. Until the pandemic is over, the scope and scale of existing schemes like ‘Ammma Canteen’ should be enlarged in terms of number and size as per the data available about the users and migrants around a specific distance to effectively address the incidence of hunger. Care should be taken to ensure the quality of the food provided at these canteens.
4. Extending required support to agricultural and food processing industries is an urgent need. This can include: providing additional credit support, postponing the repayment of monthly instalments without any additional interest rate, debt relief, proper clearance of insurance amount, increasing the subsidies (on electricity, fuel, fertilisers and other farm inputs), increasing support prices for farm products, and supporting infrastructural arrangements (like cold storage).
5. To overcome the problem of unemployment, existing development programmes, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREG) Scheme, should be accelerated during the distress situation by increasing the number of working days per person and increasing the wage rate by at least 50%. The present MGNREG scheme supports only one member in a family; it should be increased to two to three members per family, for the lockdown period. Government can also identify and implement new development projects by involving MGNREG workers in rural and urban regions.

Long-term measures

1. Given the lacunae in the present system, a structured support system right from food production to distribution should be created to ensure availability, accessibility, and affordability of essential and nutritious food commodities to all members of the society at all times.
2. As most development and industrial activities are centred around urban regions, the rural hinterland, which continues to be backward, will not be able to provide enough employment opportunities to the migrant workers who have returned to their villages due to the pandemic. Hence, supporting and establishing micro, small, and medium enterprises in villages or semi-urban areas would be an engine of growth by generating employment opportunities and subsequently arresting migration in the long run.
3. A separate statutory authority or institution should be formed to monitor, regulate, and account for the welfare of migrants and workers in the unorganised sector.
4. Migrant workers should be provided accessibility to PDS products at their workplaces.
5. It is important to supply nutrient-rich food commodities, such as finger millet, pearl millet, sorghum, and other minor millets, through the PDS to reduce micronutrient deficiencies. This will help not only poor consumers but also small and marginal farmers to profitably market at the right time for a fair price. In this regard, we need appropriate policy options.
6. All the food commodities supplied through the PDS should conform to quality and hygiene standards.
7. Digitalisation, online portals, and e-marketing and e-platforms in agricultural and food sector may help policymakers to easily manage the supply chain and food distribution across the country.
8. Since pandemics like Covid-19 cripple international trade—export and import of agricultural commodities—the country needs to recast its trade policies to safeguard the welfare of farmers, producers, and consumers. For instance, there should be lower tariffs and taxes on select imported food items, such as pulses and edible oils, to ensure adequate availability and price stability in the domestic market. Export-supportive infrastructure and logistics should be kept undisturbed by Covid-19, as India is a trade-surplus country in rice, meat, milk products, tea, honey, and horticultural products.
9. As of June 2020, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown (on the socio-economic system) has been largely felt only by experience, and not in clear, numerical terms. Therefore, it is imperative to develop a big data and analytical system to ascertain the actual negative impact of the pandemic on the employment pattern, food supply chain, food and nutrition-related health issues, and livelihoods of local and migrant workers, in order to revive the economy and redeem it from the devastation caused by the pandemic. 🌱



COVID-19 SERIES

We are in the midst of a pandemic shock as well as a deep economic recession. It necessitates extraordinary policy action. However, we do not have the luxury of time to carry out a new research plan. The situation calls for immediate reflection and action, based on available data. In the Covid-19 Series of Occasional Policy Papers, MIDS faculty contemplate on diverse issues of importance, contextualise their work to the contemporary challenge, draw attention to linkages with interrelated sectors and issues, and suggest short-to-medium-term policy measures. This series would be a useful input in the design of the state's post-pandemic socio-economic policy.

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