



## BACKGROUND

While the first COVID-19 case was confirmed on April 2, Malawi had been declared in a state of disaster on March 20. All schools were closed on March 23 and they have remained closed until now, impacting almost 6-million students. A planned nationwide lockdown was challenged in courts and was ultimately not implemented. Although the economic impacts of the crisis are still unfolding and subject to a healthy degree of uncertainty, GDP growth estimates for 2020 have already been revised down from 4.8% to 2%. The adverse effects on livelihoods, particularly on the informal economy, have been projected to be severe<sup>1</sup> and poverty is forecasted to increase by up to 4.9 percentage points in urban areas and 2.2 percentage points in rural areas<sup>2</sup>.

Against this background, in May 2020, the National Statistical Office (NSO), with support from the World Bank, has launched the High-Frequency Phone Survey on COVID-19 (HFPS COVID-19), which tracks the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on a monthly basis for a period of 12 months. The survey aimed to recontact the entire sample of households that had been interviewed during the Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS) 2019 round and that had a phone number for at least one household member or a reference individual. This brief presents findings from the first round of the survey that was conducted during the period of May 26-June 14. In Round 1, HFPS COVID-19 successfully interviewed respondents from 74% of the initial target of 2,337 households.

## KNOWLEDGE AND CONCERNS OF

**Handwashing with soap** as a measure to help reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19 is known by 99% of respondents. The second most reported measure is that of **maintaining enough distance of at least 1 meter** (76%) followed by **avoiding crowded places or gatherings with many people** (61%). Almost none of the respondents reported not having any **knowledge of measures** to help reduce the risk of contracting the virus.

Figure 1. Knowledge of measures that reduce risk of contracting COVID-19 (% of respondents)



94% of respondents reported to be **very worried** or **somewhat worried** about themselves or their immediate family member(s) becoming **seriously ill** from COVID-19. Similarly, 96% of respondents considered this crisis as a **substantial** or **moderate threat** to their household's finance. Figures 2 and 3 break down the results by pre-COVID-19 IHPS 2019 household wealth quintiles. The estimated inci-

dence of being very worried about becoming seriously ill is high across the wealth distribution, despite the small gap between respondents living in households in the richest quintile (88%) versus those living in households in the poorest quintile (92%). Similar findings emerge in the cross-quintile comparisons of the estimated incidence of perceiving COVID-19 as a substantial threat to household finances.

Figure 2. Degree of worry about self/immediate family becoming seriously ill from COVID-19

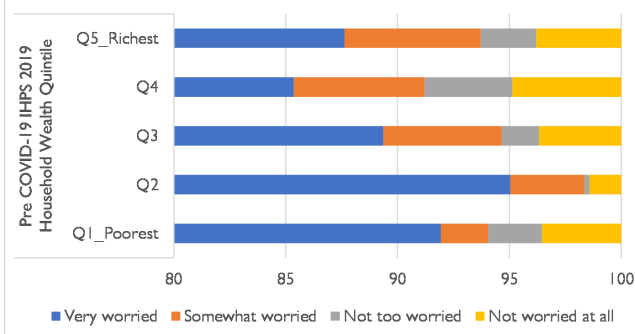
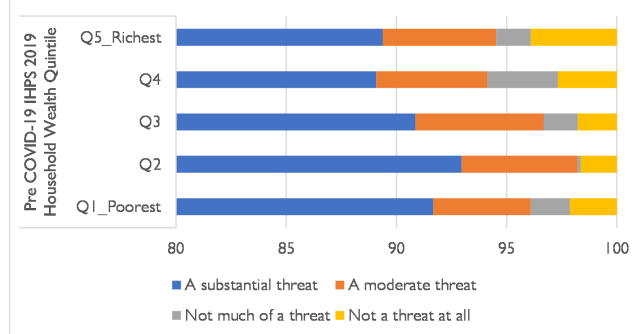


Figure 3. Degree of perception of threat to household finances caused by COVID-19



<sup>1</sup> The deceleration of growth to only 2% assumes that Malawi will not experience a widespread outbreak and the pandemic will be partially contained in the second half of 2020. With community level spread, the downside risk is much higher. Source: Malawi Economic Monitor (2020).

<sup>2</sup> Source: An ongoing Policy Brief on socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 entitled "Beyond the Health Crisis: Covid-19's Impact on Jobs and Incomes in Malawi".



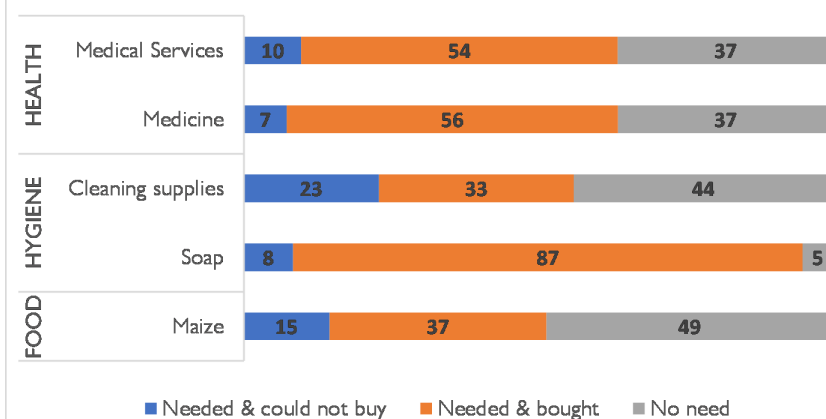
## ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS

10% of households needed **medical treatment** but reported not being able to access it.

**Soap and cleaning supplies** were reported as the most common items needed by households. Although most households were able to purchase the soap that they needed, 23% could not purchase cleaning supplies.

While 51% of households needed to buy **maize** in the last 7 days prior to the interview, 29% of these households could not do so, mainly due to high prices and lack of cash/credit.

Figure 4. Access to Basic Needs, Past 7 days (% households)



## EDUCATION

Prior to all schools being shut down on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, more than 94% of households with children between 6 and 18 years of age had at least 1 child attending school. Across urban and rural areas, and across wealth quintiles, school closures have caused a **drastic reduction in access to learning and education**. Even in the wealthiest quintile only 25% of households are participating in any type of learning activity. The comparable estimate was 7% in households in the bottom 20 percent of the pre-COVID-19 wealth quintile. The numbers are even lower for students having contact with their teachers. Only 6% of house-

holds with school age children in urban areas and 3% in rural areas had any contact with their teachers. Among these students, 27% communicated with their teachers through SMS, 14% by telephone, 33% via WhatsApp, 18% through online apps, and 8% on Facebook messenger. For the 17% of households with children between 6 and 18 with children engaged in educational activities, among students residing in rural areas the most common activity was listening to educational radio programs (35%) while in urban areas having sessions or meetings with a tutor was the highest reported (19%).

Figure 5. Share of households with children 6-18 attending any learning/education activities or having contact with teachers post closure.

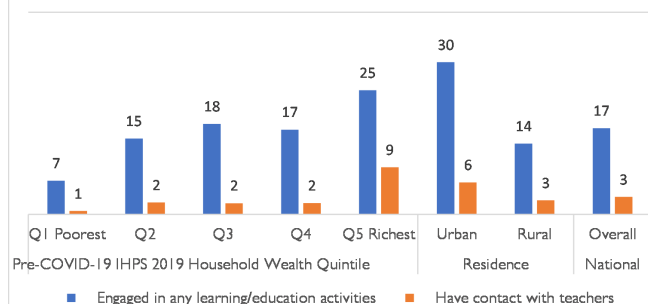
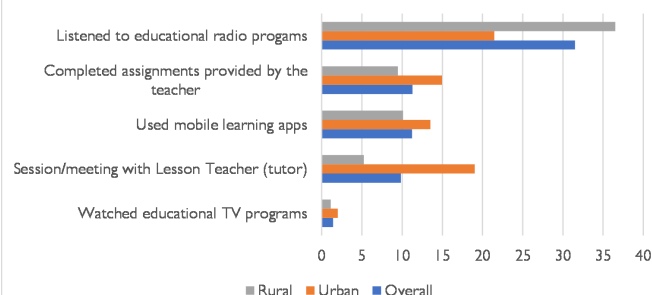


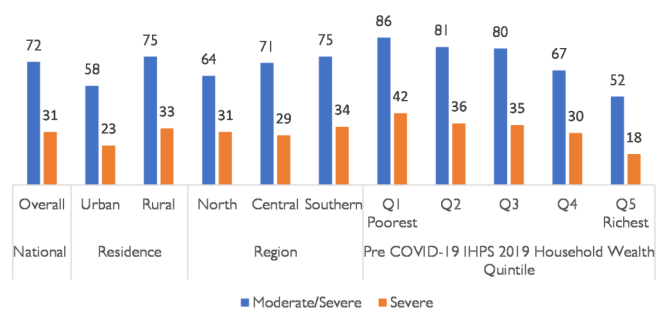
Figure 6. Educational activities students engaged in during school closure (among 18% of households that reported having students involved in activities)



## FOOD SECURITY

The prevalence of (i) severe and (ii) moderate or severe food insecurity, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, among adult population is high throughout Malawi, though more pronounced in rural areas. The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity is highest among adults living in households in the poorest wealth quintile (86%). Adults living in households in the richest wealth quintile are experiencing the lowest levels of food insecurity, yet still more than half are experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity (52%).

Figure 7. Prevalence of Severe and Moderate Food Insecurity



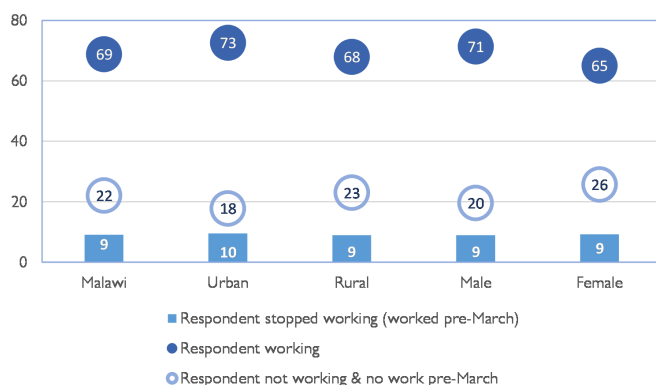


## EMPLOYMENT AND LIVELIHOOD

The survey asked respondents about **changes in their employment status** over the last week prior to the interview. Although most respondents continued to work as usual, approximately 9% of respondents **stopped working** during that period. 68% of workers in rural areas have continued their usual economic activities compared to 73% of

When considering the gender differences, 9% of both male and female respondents, respectively, reported that they stopped working during the week prior to the survey. The decline in employment appears to be broad-based though relatively larger shares of wealthier individuals reported stopping their usual economic activities.

Figure 8. Change in employment status across Malawi



A large share of small family-owned and operated businesses reported **earning less revenue** from sales after March 2020. This is true in both rural and urban Malawi.

In urban areas 88% of businesses in the services sector **reported lower or no sales revenue**. Similar widespread reported decreases in sales revenue of services sector businesses in rural areas.

Figure 9. Change in employment status by Pre-COVID-19 IHPS 2019 Household wealth quintile

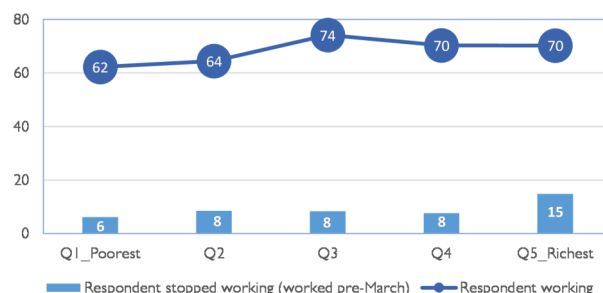
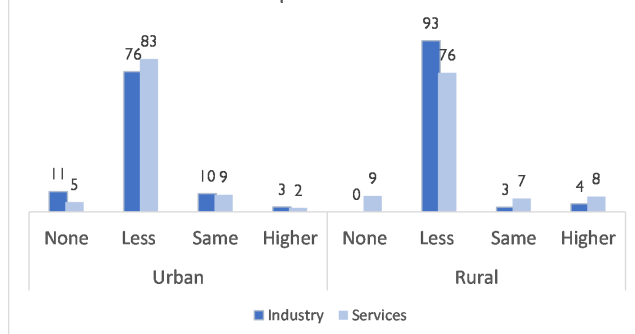


Figure 10. Changes in revenues from family business enterprises after March 2020



## AGRICULTURE

90% of the HFPS-COVID-19 sample households engaged in crop farming during the 2019/20 rainy season. When asked if the COVID-19 outbreak has affected their **crop harvesting decisions**, 8% responded affirmatively and most of those that reported so were from North and Central regions.

Of the households whose harvest decisions were affected, **delaying harvest** due to COVID-19 is widely reported

throughout Malawi. The use of safety measures against COVID-19 was reported higher in Central Malawi. The main measure taken for COVID-19 safety during harvest period were keeping social distance and staying home. When asked if **livestock activities** were affected, 5% responded affirmatively.

Figure 11. Effect of COVID-19 on Harvest Decisions and Livestock Activities

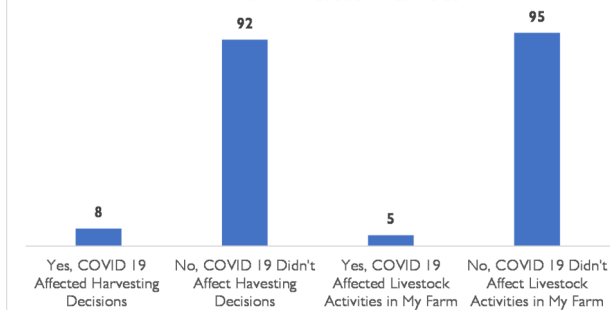
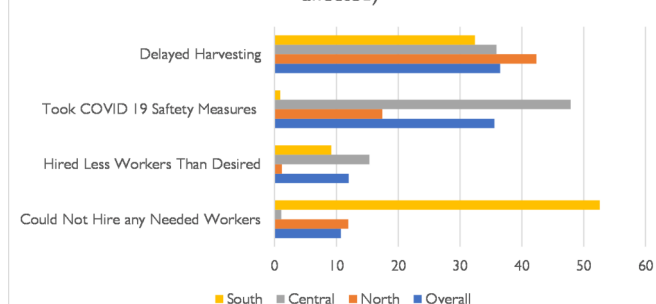


Figure 12. Effects of COVID-19 on Harvest decisions (among 8% of households that reported decisions affected)



**Data Notes:** Malawi High-Frequency Phone Survey COVID-19 (HFPS COVID-19) is implemented by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on a monthly basis during the period of May 2020 and June 2021. The survey is part of a World Bank-supported global effort to support countries in their data collection efforts to monitor the impacts of COVID-19. The financing for data collection and technical assistance in support of the Malawi HFPS COVID-19 is provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank. The technical assistance to the Malawi HFPS COVID-19 is provided by a World Bank team composed of staff from the Development Data Group—Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) program and the Poverty and Equity Global Practice. In Round 1, 2,337 households that had been previously interviewed during the 2019 round of the Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS) were contacted, and 1,729 households were successfully interviewed, with the goal of re-interviewing them in the subsequent monthly HFPS COVID-19 rounds. The 2019 IHPS data are representative at the national- and urban/rural-levels and phone survey weights were calculated (i) to counteract selection bias associated with not being able to call IHPS households without phone numbers, and (ii) to mitigate against non-response bias associated with not being able to interview all target IHPS households with phone numbers. For further details on the data, please visit <https://www.worldbank.org/lsmc-covid19> and email [enquiries@statistics.gov.mw](mailto:enquiries@statistics.gov.mw).