

Rapid food and income security assessment Round 2: How are BRAC International volunteers and programme participants coping with COVID-19

April 24, 2020

The ongoing global crises posed by COVID-19 pandemic is unlikely to be over soon. Other localised crises may exacerbate the situation. For example, the countries in East Africa are dealing with locust outbreaks and alarming rise in water levels of the Lake Victoria while undergoing various levels of economic and social lockdowns to contain or delay COVID-19 spread. As an organization built on the principle of standing with the most vulnerable, particularly in times of crisis, BRAC is committed to supporting local communities and helping them respond to the outbreak initially with humanitarian interventions, but transitioning to socio-economic rehabilitation and development programs as quickly as possible. To address the challenges posed by this pandemic, BRAC International has developed a four-pronged strategy that includes – ensuring safety and security of staffs, contributing in containment through awareness raising as per WHO guidelines, partnering in localized responses to outbreaks and support for economically vulnerable population. To inform the priorities for the vulnerable population, BRAC has been conducting periodic situation assessment in countries where BRAC International have been implementing development and humanitarian programmes. Following an assessment conducted in the first week of April, a second round of phone interviews were done. This report presents findings from this second round of assessment.

Table 1. Profile of phone interview respondents

	AFG	NPL	PHL	MMR	TZA	UGA	SLE	LBR	RWA	Total
<u>Relationship with BRAC</u>										
Volunteers (%)	52	35	31	16	25	65	26	25	50	39
Participants (%)	48	65	69	84	75	35	74	75	50	61
Lives in urban areas (%)	43	31	2	20	83	46	48	46	79	49
Lives in rural areas (%)	57	69	98	80	17	54	52	54	21	51
At usual residence (%)	96	91	100	100	96	97	96	96	99	97
Female (%)	56	69	55	25	85	91	90	86	100	76
Respondent age (mean)	33	36	38	45	31	40	36	37	39	37
Respondent is HH head	32	37	84	65	26	39	29	34	54	38
Spouse of HH head	16	25	10	11	14	56	59	63	46	37
Other	52	38	6	24	60	5	13	3	1	25
HH size (mean)	9.2	5.4	6.4	5.1	4.3	6.8	7.5	5.6	5.6	6.5
Female headed HH (%)	13	15	45	5	21	32	19	22	54	22
<u>Main source of income for their household</u>										
Business (%)	6	8	6	10	70	56	60	62	79	44
Salaried work (%)	39	16	31	8	7	14	8	11	3	16
Causal/day labour (%)	38	24	0	15	13	7	3	12	9	15
Agriculture/livestock (%)	12	41	61	63	9	23	28	13	9	23
Has mobile/bank A/C (%)	70	68	29	22	28	78	95	92	99	70
<u>Usual main source of food</u>										
Own production (%)	4	19	16	35	11	17	4	2	2	11
Purchase (%)	92	77	45	49	71	51	75	88	53	70
Production & purchase (%)	3	2	14	3	18	30	20	8	0	13
Food aid (%)	1	2	22	9	1	1	0	0	30	3
Number of respondents	447	116	49	230	330	500	315	337	151	2,475

Since the essence of the assessment is to generate a quick and periodic overview of the food and income situation of the population served by BRAC, emphasis has been put on gathering information as quickly as possible. Therefore, brief structured questionnaires are designed to conduct phone interviews. To draw the respondent sample, BRAC monitoring teams in each country compiled the contact information of different programmes that were readily available. The sample includes individuals who work as community agents or volunteers with BRAC programmes (such as community health promoter, club facilitators/mentors, community agriculture promoters, teachers etc.) as well as programme participants or beneficiaries. While the first round of interviews (conducted on April 1-2, 2020) covered 1,019 respondents from 8 (out of 10 countries where BRAC International is operating), the scope of this assessment was expanded in the 2nd round.¹ Total number of respondents in this round of phone interviews is 2,475 which includes respondents from the first round of assessment. These interviews were conducted between April 16 and 22, 2020. In addition to increasing the number of interviews, a few questions were added (while keeping the length of interview less than 10 minutes) and a few key informant interviews were conducted. Respondents from Rwanda, which was not included in the previous assessment, were also added in this round. While the descriptive statistics reflect the food security situation of BRAC's volunteers and participants, the figures should be read with due caution and should not be used to extrapolate for the whole population in each country.²

Table I gives some basic summary statistics of the respondents participating in this assessment. Overall, 61% the respondents are engaged with BRAC International (BI) as volunteers and the rest as programme participants. Average household size varies between 4.3 in Tanzania and 9.2 in Afghanistan. Overall, 20% of the survey respondents come from female headed households. In terms of the main source of income, majority of the respondents' households in all five of the countries in Africa rely on business. Salaried and casual work are more common for the respondents in Afghanistan. Agriculture and livestock is the primary income source for majority of the respondents' households in the Philippines and Myanmar. Overall, the profile of the sample households does not differ much from the first round's sample.

Effects on income

In Figure 1 we show the distribution of the household by the extent of effects they have suffered so far due to COVID-19. The impact on the source of income seems to be strongly related to the government strategies put in place and where the countries are in relation to the outbreak curve. For example, a complete loss of income was reported by almost 50% of Ugandan respondents where there has been a complete shutdown on most economic activities for almost a month. While the lockdown efforts have been effective in containment of infection in Uganda and Rwanda, the economic effects have been sharper. On the other hand, Sierra Leone confirmed the first case of COVID-19 on 31st March with main responses being school closures and restrictions on mass gatherings. A good portion (27%) of the respondents in Afghanistan reported no effect on income who are primarily reliant on salaried income. Other than this exception, vast majority of respondents in all other countries have reported experiencing income drop by "a little" or "a lot".

Since the interviews in both rounds followed the same questionnaire structure, it is more relevant to analyze the trend. Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who reported that their household income has completely stopped or have reduced "a lot" in week 1 and in week 3. As expected, the rates of being affected by income loss has increased across all the countries. However, the rises have been sharper in Nepal, Tanzania and Liberia. Countries that already had high ratio of households facing income loss in week 1 such as the Philippines and Uganda did not show any significant change in week 3.

¹ Click here to find the report of the first round of food security assessment conducted by BRAC International. http://www.bracuk.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Covid-FS-Rapid-Assessment-BI_20200404.pdf

² Please visit link for country specific reports produced from the survey where data permitted reasonable disaggregation.

Figure 1. The effect of COVID-19 on regular sources of income

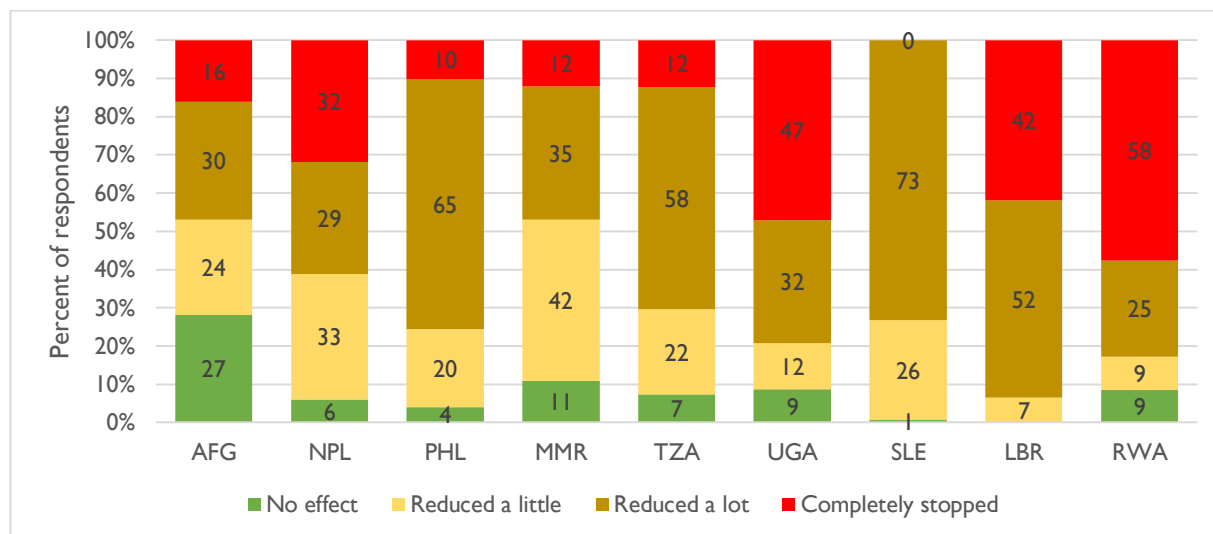
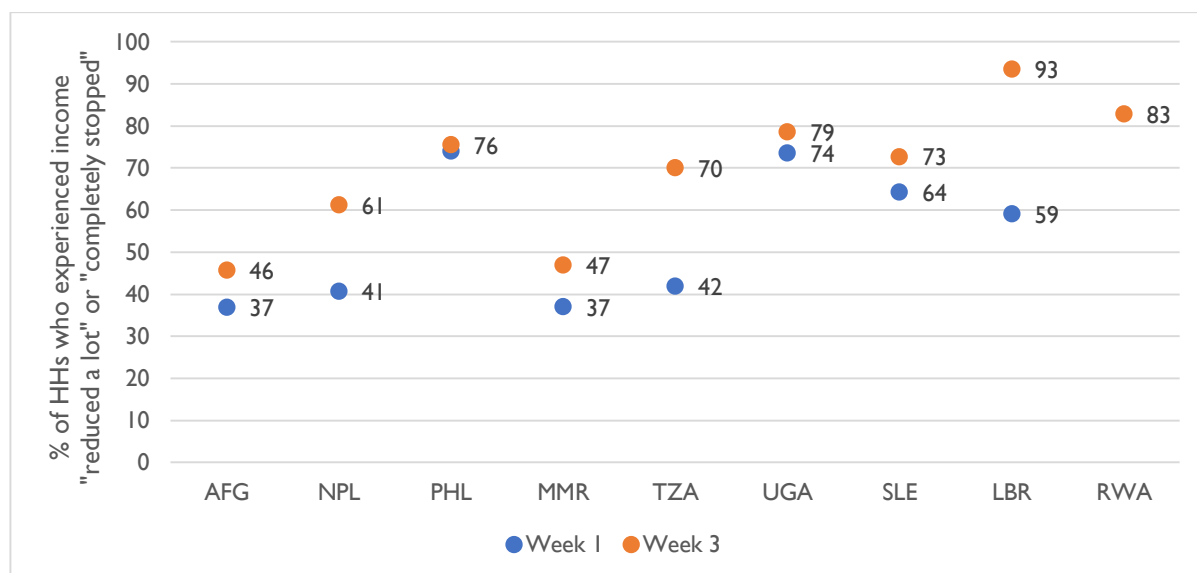


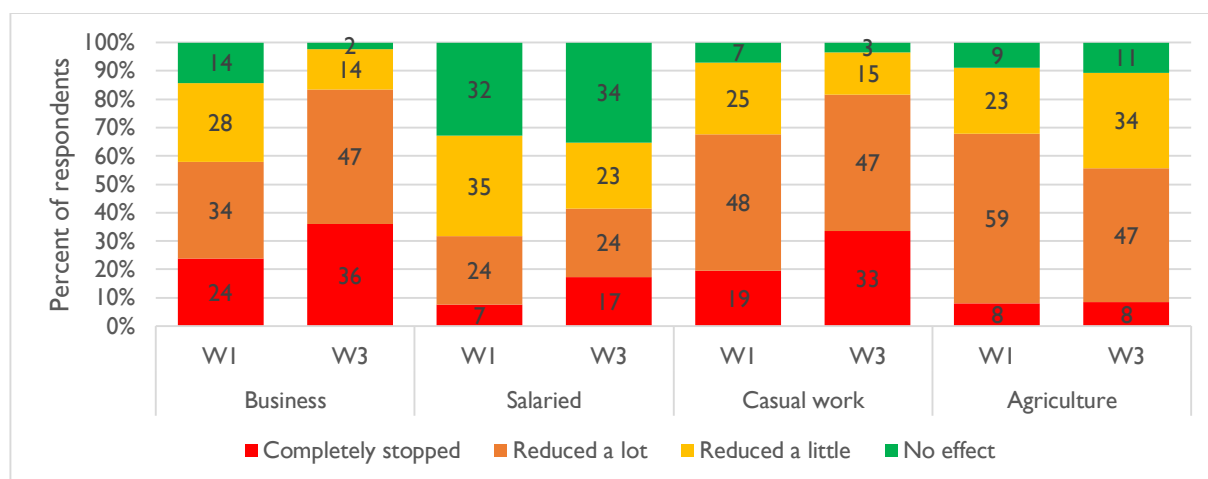
Figure 2. Trend in income reduction between 2 rounds



Note: Rwanda could not be included in the trend analysis

Figure 3 shows how the income drops vary by their main source of income between the two rounds of assessment. As expected, respondents who rely mainly on salaried income are more likely to have reported “no change” compared to the households relying on other income sources. However among these groups the percentage facing “completely stopped income” increased from 7% to 17%. It can be anticipated that with prolonged lockdowns and business being affected, many salaried employments are also likely to become unavailable. It is also noteworthy that even among the households with salaried income, about two-thirds have experienced some reduction in income. Overall, households relying on business and casual work are most severely affected and the effect of the pandemic is rising faster for them. Households who rely on agriculture and livestock are relatively less affected so far. The main reason for their income loss is due to limitations in transport services to sell their produces. Although goods and commodity transports are generally kept outside lockdown, they are indirectly affected through reduced demand. If the situation prolongs, they are likely to face more serious income loss in near future.

Figure 3. Trend in income change between 2 rounds by main source of income



Chi-square value is 600, and p-value is <0.001

Effects on food consumption and food availability

COVID-19 related response activities are not only affecting food security by lowering income but also by lowering access to food due to restrictions (including market closures or restriction on movements) that are being or have already been put in place to prevent infection. Majority of the respondents in Liberia, Philippines, Uganda, and Rwanda have reported that they had to reduce food consumption “a lot” than before (Figure 4).

Since Liberia largely relies on imported food, the population of Liberia is prone to food insecurity than other BI countries. During the survey an overwhelming 84% reported reducing food consumption by “a lot” and the remaining 16% faced “a little” reduction in food consumption. Governments in some countries have started to respond the food needs. For example, in the Philippines, the government has been providing cash and food assistance to persons that are affected by the lockdown. As we also found in the interviews, all of the respondents from the Philippines reported receiving assistance. However, government initiative alone is not enough the vast population that has been affected by this pandemic. Government’s efforts would require to be supplemented by the efforts from the various partners to cover the large number of vulnerable populations. A minority of respondents (less than 10%) in Afghanistan and Tanzania also reported increasing food consumption. Qualitative follow-up interviews reveal that these are mainly due to increase in number of mounts to be fed, in many households, children who used to live in boarding schools have come back home due to school closure. A few respondents in Afghanistan also reported that they are increasing food consumption to maintain or improve their level of immunity in order to fight against COVID-19.

Figure 4. Change in food consumption (frequency of meal or amount of food)

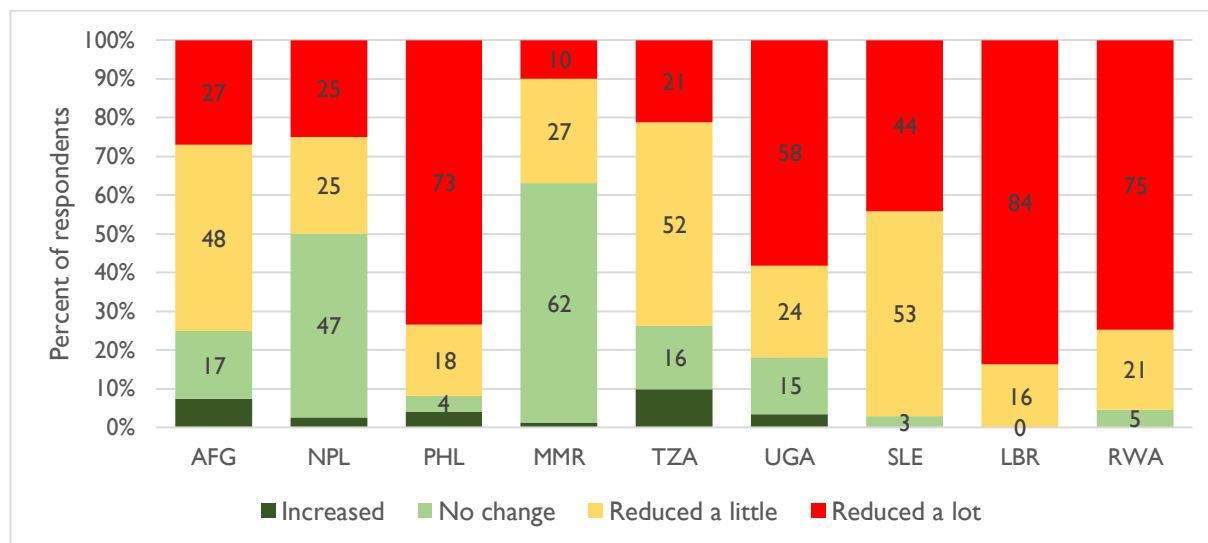
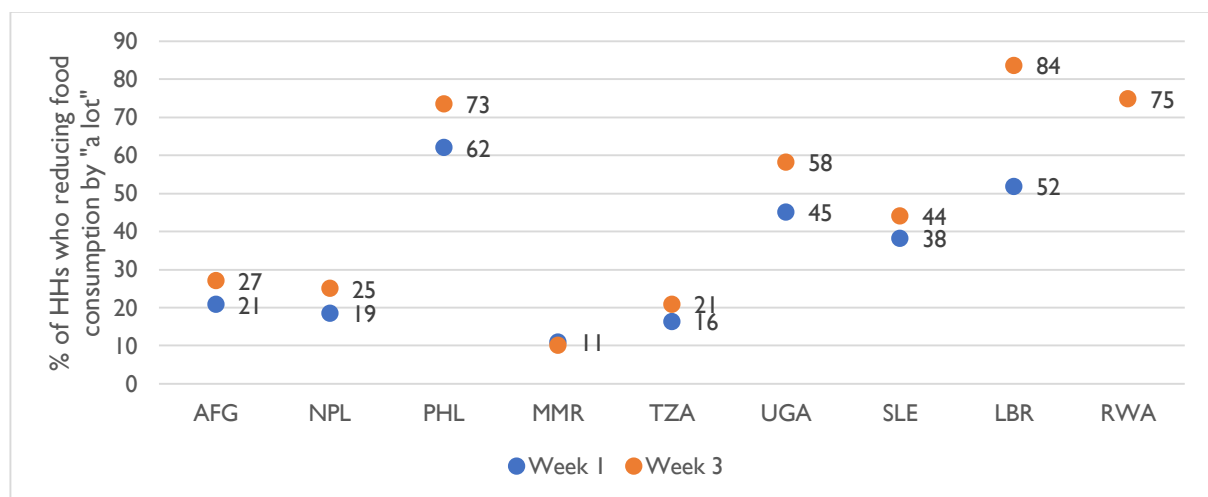


Figure 5 shows the trend in the percentage of households who have experienced “a lot of reduction” in food consumption between the two rounds. The most drastic change is observed in Liberia where percentage of population who reported to reduce food consumption a lot has increased significantly (52% in week1 to 84% in week3). This percentage has also increased in Uganda and Philippines, in Uganda it is about 13 percentage points and 11 percentage points in the Philippines. Although there has been a sharp decline in income for the respondents in Tanzania between the two rounds, the effects on food consumption are not as prominent yet.

Figure 5. Trend in reduction of food consumption



While there are already a good number of people needing immediate supports to access food, this ratio of people needing support is increasing and will continue to rise in the coming weeks. To understand respondents’ ability to access food (taking into account for current stock of food at home, financial ability to purchase and access to shops), we asked the respondents– “how many days can you sustain your food needs based on the amount of food you have at home right now?”. Figure 6 shows the distribution by country. The majority of respondents in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, and Philippines reported that they can sustain “less than a week”. It is worth mentioning here that these countries have already reduced their food consumption a lot (Figure 4). The respondents in Myanmar seems to be managing their food needs better relative to other countries.

Figure 6. How long can meet food needs with available means

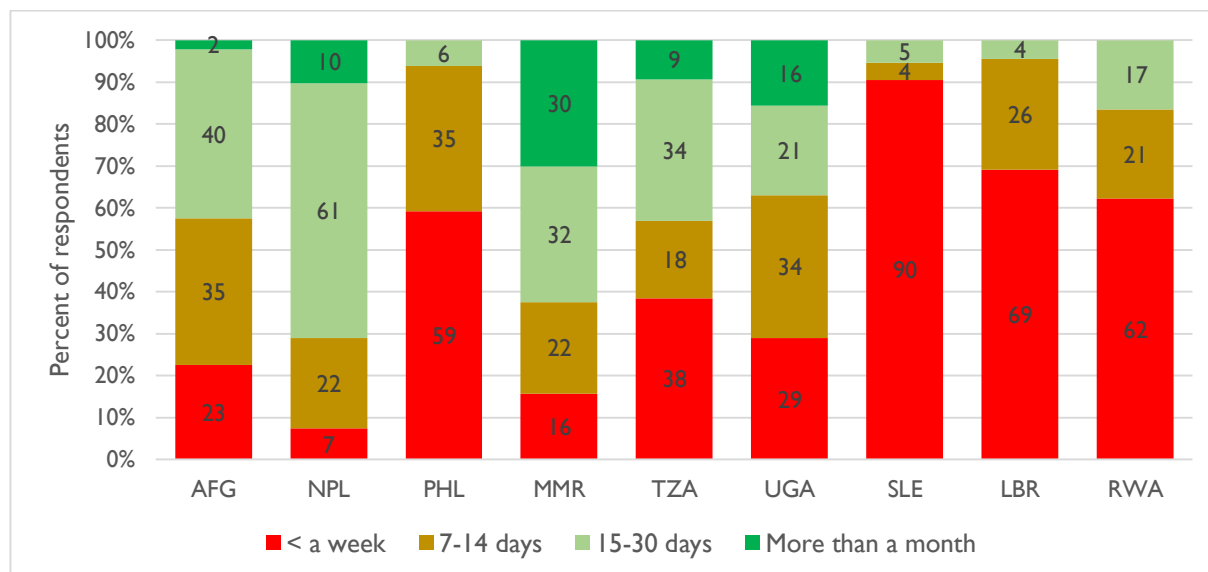


Figure 7 shows the trend in food stock. In general, the number of days that they can sustain on available food stock is decreasing as anticipated. The decline is about 3-6 days' with an important exception in Myanmar. Since over 60% of the respondent in Myanmar are primarily farming households and there has been some recent crop harvests, their food stock increased by about 8 days on average between week 1 and 3. This also reinforces the general pattern of lower food insecurity among the farming households.

Figure 7. Trend in ability to meet food needs with current food stock

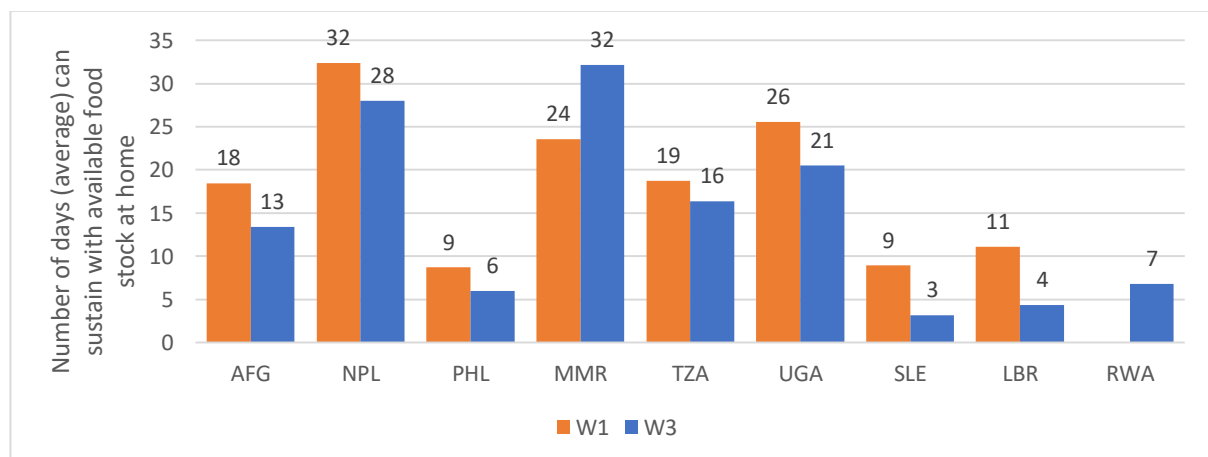
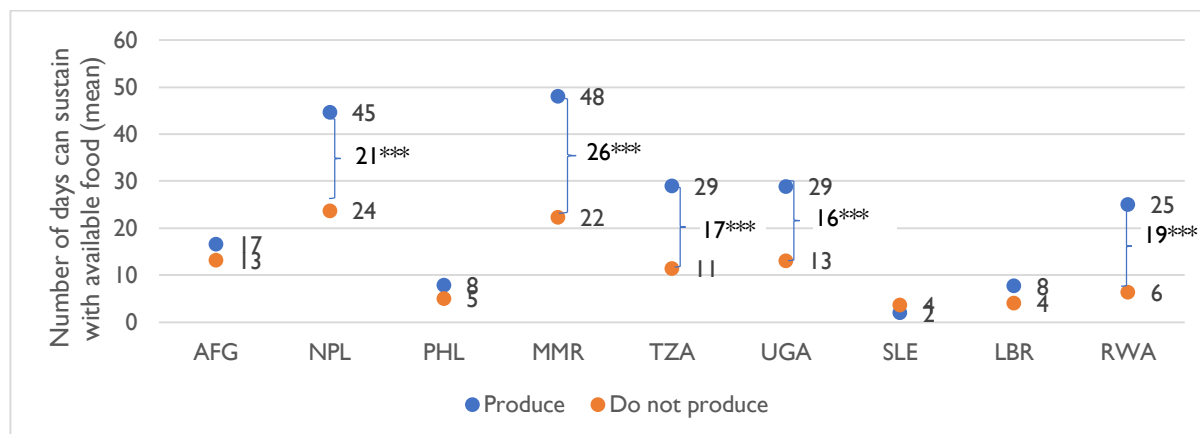


Figure 8 shows the differences in food stock by those who usually produce their own food vs. food purchase, as well as male vs. female headship. Not surprisingly, households who mainly produce their own food are better stocked than those who either purchase or rely on alternatives (e.g. reliefs or supports from relatives). The differences are more prominent and statistically significant for the respondents in Nepal, Myanmar, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda. The gap is the highest in Myanmar (48 days vs. 22 days). The respondents in Sierra Leone have the lowest food stock irrespective of their involvement in producing food crops for own consumption.

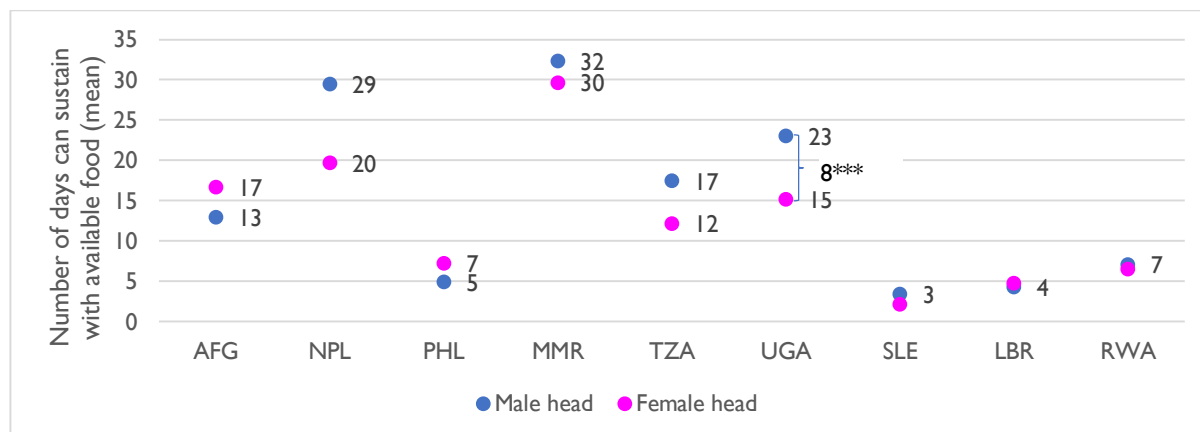
Figure 8. Food availability at home by own production as food



*** denotes statistical significance at <1% level

Figure 9 shows the differences in food stock between male and female headed households. In the assessment of the first week of April, we found a few countries where female headed households had higher food stock than their male counterparts. However, in this round the short-term advantage of female headed households have disappeared. Among the 9 countries, there is statistically significant difference in Uganda where male headed household on average have 8 more days of food stock than female headed ones. Although the differences are not statistically significant (partly due to small sample sizes) the average days' of food stock is also higher among male headed households in Nepal and Tanzania.

Figure 9. Female headed households may become more vulnerable to hunger



*** denotes statistical significance at <1% level

Figure 10 shows the male-female headship dynamics for the Philippines, Myanmar, Tanzania and Uganda where we see an indication of this reversing trend whereby female headship are reflecting higher vulnerability over the two weeks.

Figure 10. Food security by female headship has reversed in 2 weeks

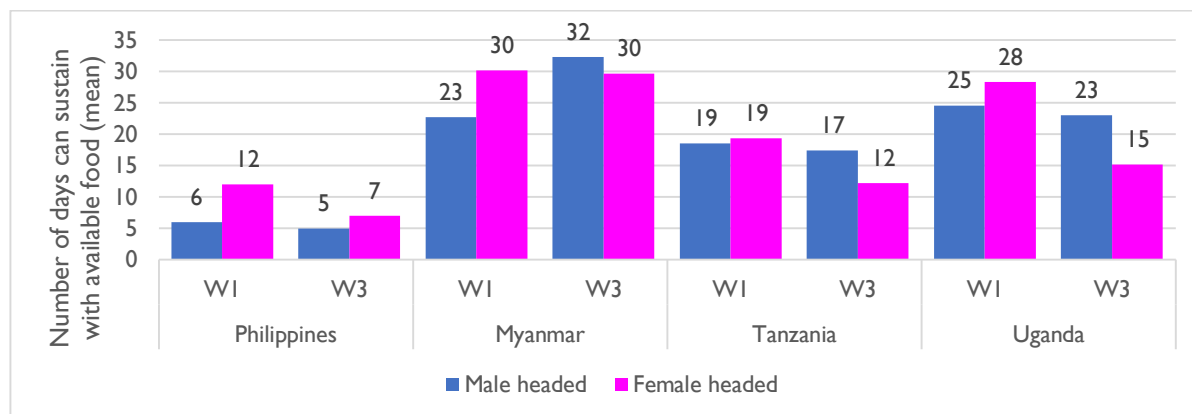
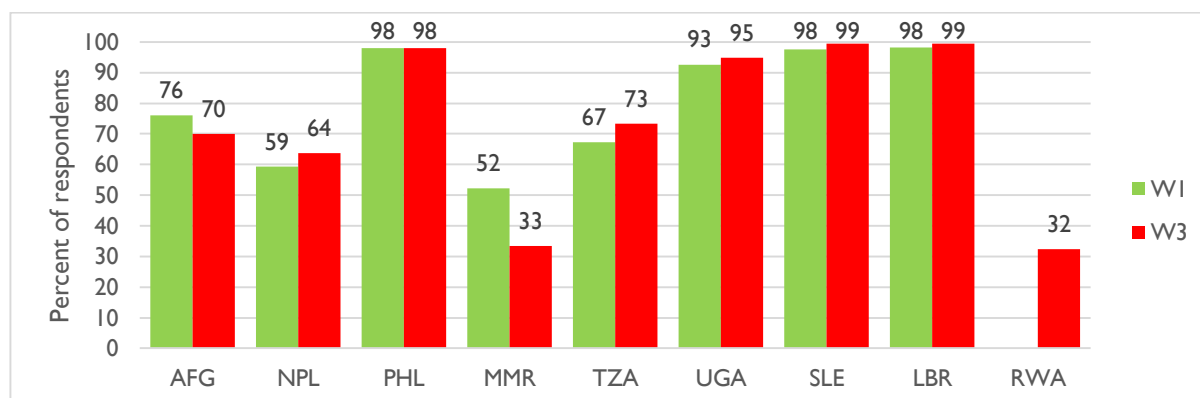


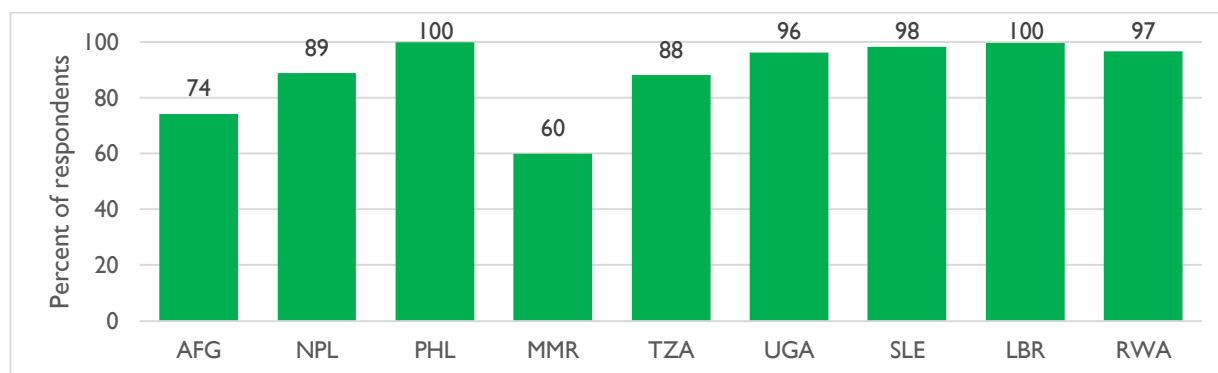
Figure 11 shows the percentage of respondents who reported to spend more than usual on buying food due to price increase. The trend shows that these are country specific concerns. The countries with price hikes (the Philippines, Uganda, Sierra Leon and Liberia) are consistently showing having to spend more than usual on food items. Respondents in Rwanda seems to be less affected by price increase compared to other countries although we cannot establish a trend at this point. Price hike as an issue seems to have subsided a bit in Myanmar with 33% reported having to spend more in week 3 compared to 52% in week 1.

Figure 11. Spending more than usual on food due to higher price



In addition to price change, we asked the respondents “are people in your community able to buy necessary items if they have money?” in the 2nd round of interviews to understand the extent of problems related to market access. It appears that market access or availability of products in the market are not a major issue in most of the countries. About 26% of the respondents in Afghanistan reported challenges in accessing market, which are from locations that are usually have the constraint and not necessarily due to the pandemic or related lockdowns. About 40% of the respondents in Myanmar reported market access issues, but they are primarily residing in rural areas.

Figure 12. Able to buy items locally if have money



Given the differences and trends, we conducted a summary analysis of the correlates of food security to understand the types of households who are more vulnerable to food insecurity. Table 2 shows the analysis results where outcome variable is the “number of days that they households can sustain with current food stock”. After controlling for country level “fixed effects”, we find that BRAC’s participants have on average 1.6 fewer days of food stock compared to the volunteers. Although the volunteers are usually from the same communities as the participants, it is conceivable that they are at a *slightly* better-off position than the average participant. The main income source of the respondents’ households seems to have a major contribution to their food security. Compared to business owners (base category), casual workers have almost 5 fewer days’ food stock. Not surprisingly, the average agriculture/livestock dependent household have 8 additional days of food stock than the business owners. Households living in urban locations and headed by a female member are more vulnerable to food shortage based on this indicator of food stock. Finally, households with bank account and access to market (which are the majority) are at relatively better position than those who do not have these options. This poses a challenge for reaching them with humanitarian programming, where cash transfer over mobile money is a prominent tool.

Table 2. Correlates of food security

VARIABLES	Coefficient
Participant (1=yes, 0=Volunteers)	-1.573 (0.755)**
Salaried employment (1=Yes, 0=Business)	-0.917 (1.144)
Casual worker (1=Yes, 0=Business)	-4.968 (1.133)***
Agriculture/livestock (1=Yes, 0=Business)	8.129 (1.006)***
Others (1=Yes, 0=Business)	-4.519 (2.225)**
Urban local (1=Yes, 0=Rural)	-3.431 (0.762)***
Female Headed HH (1=Yes, 0=No)	-2.927 (0.833)***
Has mobile/bank account (1=Yes, 0=No)	6.032 (0.890)***
Has access to market (1=Yes, 0=No)	2.508 (1.120)**
Constant	10.791 (1.404)***
Country fixed effect	Yes
Observations	2,439
R-squared	0.295

*, ** and *** represents statistical significance at <10%, <5% and <1% respectively. Robust standard error in parenthesis

Ability to fulfill non-food essential needs

In order to gauge the possible effects on non-food essentials, we asked the respondents, “how long can you sustain your non-food essential needs based on what you have with you including cash, mobile money or any other cash savings or income that is accessible?”. It seems that there are also immediate support requirements for meeting their non-food essentials than food (Figure 13). Higher share of respondents in Afghanistan, Nepal, Liberia and Rwanda need supports for non-food needs within a week compared to the respective rates of food stock. Figure 14 shows the trend in percentage of

households who are not able to meet non-food needs for a full week between the two rounds of assessment. We see an increase in this vulnerability to not meeting non-food essential needs in Afghanistan, Nepal, the Philippines, Uganda and Liberia.

Figure 13. Ability to sustain non-food necessities

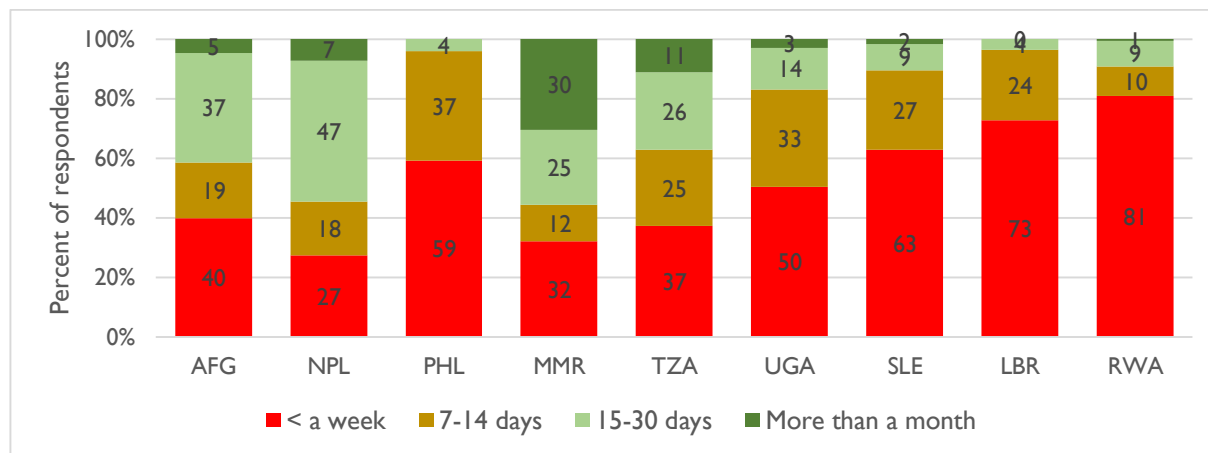
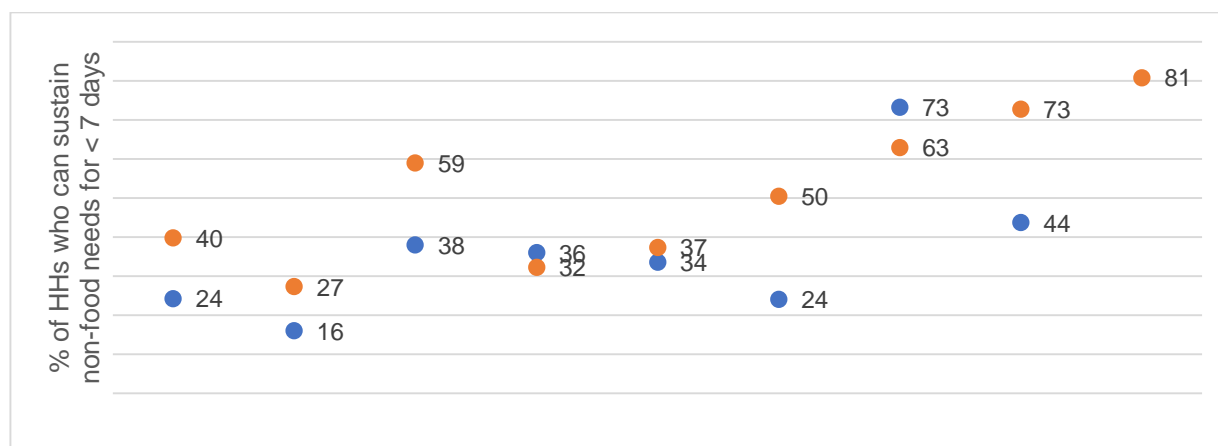


Figure 14. Trend in ability to meet non-food needs



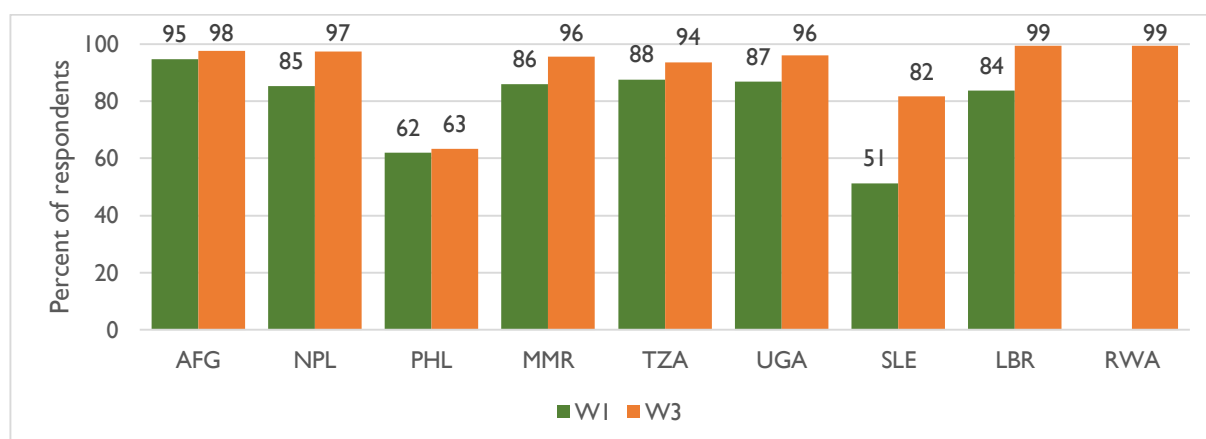
Anticipated coping mechanism and support needs

Table 3 show the distribution of the households by their coping strategies in second round and anticipated coping strategies in the first round. This question was asked slightly differently between the two rounds. In round 1, we asked about their plans to meet food and non-food needs if the situation continues to be the same (as per current situation in their respective countries). In the 2nd round, it was asked as, “How are you coping with this situation (manage essential food and non-food expenses)?”. Overall, borrowing was reported by 38% of the respondents, and predominantly by the respondents from the Philippines (92%), Liberia (63%) and Nepal (52%). Current income was reported frequently in Afghanistan (55%), the Philippines (46%) and Myanmar (43%). Their current coping strategies largely follow the pattern of their anticipated coping mechanisms. Using savings and borrowing are the most frequently mentioned coping mechanisms besides their current income. About half of the respondents in Liberia reported relying on new income sources. However, exact types of these new sources could not be established.

Table 3. Trend in coping mechanisms

	AFG	NPL	PHL	MMR	TZA	UGA	SLE	LBR	RWA
Week 3 of April 2020									
Current income (%)	34	48	37	43	37	23	94	9	17
Savings (%)	17	32	49	58	19	20	22	1	48
Borrow (%)	57	28	88	17	23	15	29	41	19
Sell assets (%)	21	4	27	26	4	3	5	1	1
New income source	2	3	0	1	22	13	24	52	11
Reducing consumption	10	14	0	0	14	37	34	65	18
Will not be able to cope	21	22	16	1	42	21	15	0	12
Week 1 of April, 2020									
Current income (%)	55	37	46	43	30	16	41	9	-
Savings (%)	14	56	52	29	39	29	7	12	-
Borrow (%)	43	52	92	17	31	26	21	63	-
Sell assets (%)	17	7	24	16	7	19	2	13	-
Will not be able to cope (%)	12	11	16	9	27	27	61	26	-

Information dissemination is certainly an important strategy to contain or delay the spread of the virus. The Ministries of Health are taking leads in all these countries with supports from WHO. Media, private sector and NGOs are also trying make contribution in this information dissemination. In order to understand if the respondents feel they have received information on what they can do to keep them safe from getting infected, we asked, “do you think that you have access to enough information regarding how to be safe from corona virus?”. Figure 15 shows that over 80% of the respondents of most of these countries felt having access to adequate information in week I. The rate has increased substantially in Sierra Leone, where there have been massive national efforts on information dissemination in April. Interestingly, the respondents in the Philippines seem to be feeling more need of information despite higher digital access there. It is possible that the need for information is more localized among the BRAC’s volunteers and participants. One obvious limitation of such indicator of information availability is – this shows their opinion that are not necessarily reflective of their actual level of awareness and knowledge. However, other assessments that are focused on information (e.g. in Nepal) has shown that the level of knowledge is generally quite high.

Figure 15. Access to information on safety from COVID 19 infection

We also asked the respondents what supports they feel are mostly needed (Table 4). Not surprisingly, information was reported by only 20% of the respondents in week I and have reduced further in the second round. Access to food items has remained high. Overall, there has been little change in the support needs between the two weeks.

Table 4. Supports needed if the current situation persists in the country

	AFG	NPL	PHL	MMR	TZA	UGA	SLE	LBR	RWA
Week 3 of April 2020									
Food items	88	79	100	73	67	84	98	74	89
Non-food essentials	34	5	18	1	22	29	8	12	44
Health care	33	21	51	56	31	40	70	29	3
Hygiene products	21	36	49	14	31	16	9	9	10
Psychosocial support	2	4	2	2	7	1	2	1	1
Loan services	5	9	63	9	23	19	20	16	4
Information	6	9	0	15	14	2	3	0	0
Week 1 of April 2020									
Food items	93	89	100	80	56	88	97	94	-
Non-food essentials	22	4	24	7	10	25	16	45	-
Health care	59	41	58	49	27	60	53	49	-
Hygiene products	30	44	46	28	30	17	27	38	-
Psychosocial support	4	4	2	3	10	3	1	2	-
Loan services	10	19	66	7	23	24	39	47	-
Information	40	4	0	3	16	14	28	7	-

Note: multiple responses allowed.

Supports received

As mentioned earlier, all the respondents in the Philippines have reported receiving supports to cope with the ongoing crisis (Figure 16). This support came from the government in terms of food and non-food essentials (Table 5). The other countries where some level of supports is becoming available includes Rwanda, Myanmar and Nepal. These are mostly support from the government in terms of food distribution. In Rwanda, over 10% of the respondents also reported receiving supports from their friends and relatives. The rate of response supports in all the other countries are almost non-existent.

Figure 16. Received any support for coping with COVID pandemic

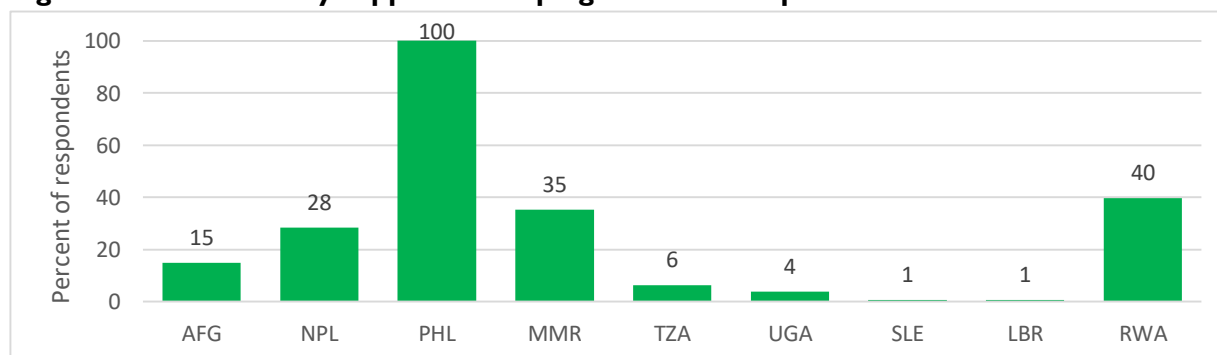


Table 5. Source and natures of supports

	AFG	NPL	PHL	MMR	TZA	UGA	SLE	LBR	RWA
Received supports from									
The Government	3	22	100	33	0	1	0	0	30
NGOs	6	4	27	2	4	0	0	0	0
Community	5	4	0	2	1	0	0	0	1
Friend/relatives	4	1	14	0	2	3	1	0	11
Types of supports									
Food items	5	24	100	34	1	2	1	1	40
Non-food essentials	2	0	100	1	0	1	0	0	1
Health care	9	1	18	4	1	0	0	0	0
Hygiene products	2	7	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
Psychosocial	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Loan services	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Information	11	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Cash transfer	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Impacts on other aspects of lives

In this second assessment, we also asked questions about two additional aspects (besides food security and income) of the effects of COVID– violence in the community and children’s time use at home who are affected by school closure. Figure 17 shows the percentage of respondents who reported being aware about increase in violence in their community. Although increase in domestic and gender-based violence are being found in various reports, we did not ask the respondents’ personal experience due to ethical concerns. Our indirect assessment of violence shows that it is a concern in Uganda and Afghanistan.

Figure 17. Increase in violence in the community

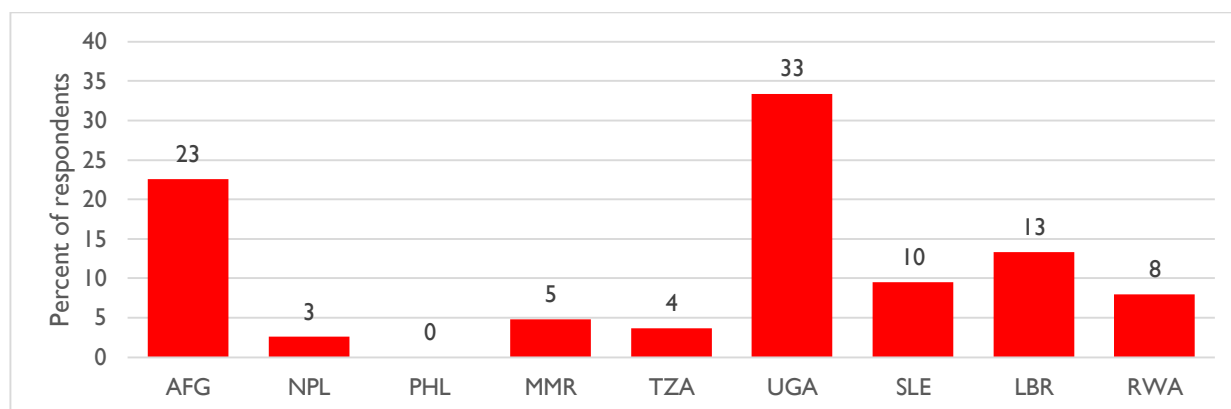


Table 6 shows how the children who are staying home due to school closures are spending their times. Majority of the respondents reported that they are studying from home. Children helping with household chores were reported by good share of respondents in the Philippines (73%), Uganda (71%) and Sierra Leone (59%).

Table 6. Children’s time spent

	AFG	NPL	PHL	MMR	TZA	UGA	SLE	LBR	RWA
Studying (%)	55	18	67	27	57	63	79	80	86
Playing (%)	33	55	61	45	30	41	72	28	5
Watching TV (%)	40	23	22	48	26	18	29	4	7
Time on computer/mobile (%)	5	14	4	10	3	1	1	2	4
Helping with HH chores (%)	19	28	73	18	32	71	59	14	1
Doing creating work (%)	3	3	2	1	10	4	2	1	6
Staying idle (%)	12	5	0	3	9	9	8	0	8

Note: Responses are % of HHs reporting what the children are doing, not percent of children. Multiple responses included.

Conclusion

The objective of this rapid assessment is to generate periodic data that can inform the ongoing discussions, review of strategy and actions by BRAC International to be more effective in contributing to the global efforts in dealing with the current pandemic. Findings from the second round and the trend indicates imminent need of expanding humanitarian programming. It seems that cash transfer over mobile money can be an effective solution since the market for food and non-food essentials are relatively functional. Ownership of mobile money is also relatively high to make fast transfers. However, we also need to remember that all the participants of this assessment have phones that may not be reflective of the entire volunteer and beneficiary groups. Therefore, preparatory works in terms of establishing payment systems and creating mobile money access to those who currently do not have it will enable faster rollout of any transfer-based humanitarian programming that BRAC international may expand.