



BACKGROUND

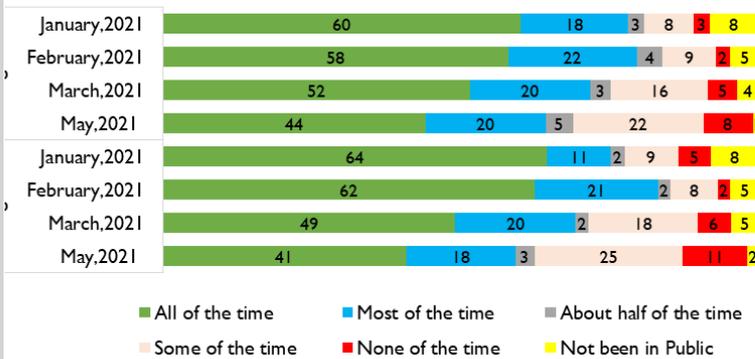
The COVID-19 pandemic has socio-economic impacts on Malawians and there is need for timely data to monitor these impacts and support response efforts to the pandemic. In May 2020, the National Statistical Office (NSO), with support from the World Bank, launched the High Frequency Phone Survey on COVID-19; a monthly survey of a nationally representative sample of households previously interviewed as part of the Malawi Integrated Household Panel Survey to monitor the economic impact of the pandemic and other shocks. This brief presents the findings from the tenth and eleventh rounds of the Malawi High-Frequency Phone Survey on COVID-19 (HFPS COVID-19) conducted between the 29th of April and the 9th of June 2021.

BEHAVIOR AND CONCERNS ASSOCIATED WITH COVID-19

There has been a decline in the proportion of individuals who wear a face mask all the times when in public. The proportion was 64% in January 2021 but has declined to 41% in May 2021.

There has also been a decline in the proportion of individuals who wash hands with soap after being in public. In January 2021, the proportion was 60% but declined to 44% in May 2021.

Figure 1. Hand Washing with Soap after being in Public and Mask Wearing (% of respondents)



Overtime, it appears there is more laxity in following the COVID-19 preventive guidelines set by the authorities and this could partially be because people are becoming less and less worried about becoming seriously ill from COVID-19.

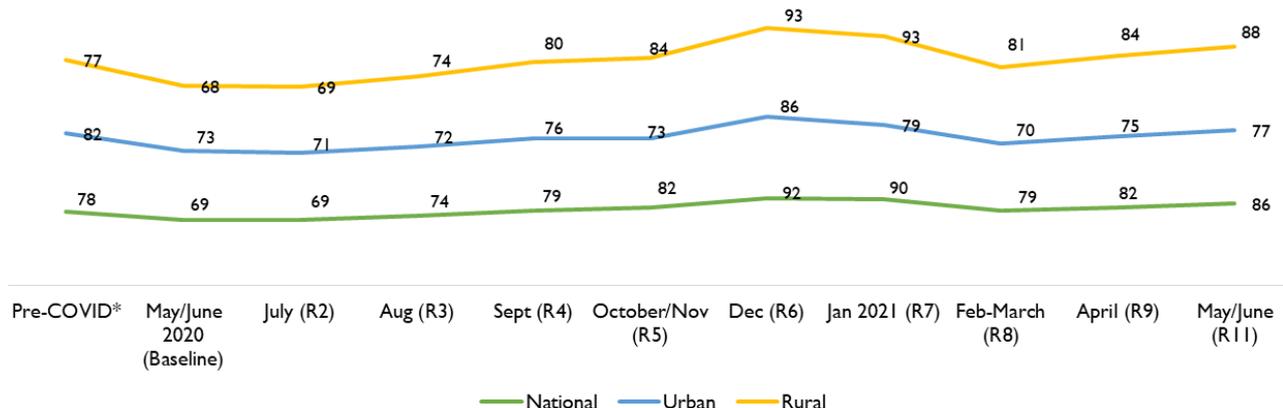
The proportion of people worried about becoming ill due to COVID-19 has reduced between January 2021 (Round 7) and May 2021 (Round 11); from 87% to 67%.

Similarly, the perceived threat to household's finance caused by COVID-19 has declined over time. In January 2021, 88% reported as a substantial threat and this proportion has declined to 67% in May 2021.

EMPLOYMENT, BUSINESSES AND INCOME

For the period between April and June 2021, employment levels in Malawi showed a recovery after the continuous reductions observed at the start of the year. In June, 86% of people were working; a proportion that is larger than the one observed in pre-COVID-19 times (78%). As observed during 2020, employment in rural areas has grown faster than in urban areas, where the amount of people working is still below pre-COVID-19 times. The improvement in employment levels across the different waves could be partially explained by the normal cycles in agriculture where households usually engaged in rainy season farming. Among people working, most of them kept the same job as in the last month.

Figure 2. Work Status Overtime (% of Respondents)





Among people who stopped working, only 11% were due to COVID-19 related reasons which contrasts with the figures observed at the onset of the crisis when half of the job losses were due to COVID-19 related reasons.

Figure 3. Reasons for Work Stoppages (% of Respondents who stopped working)

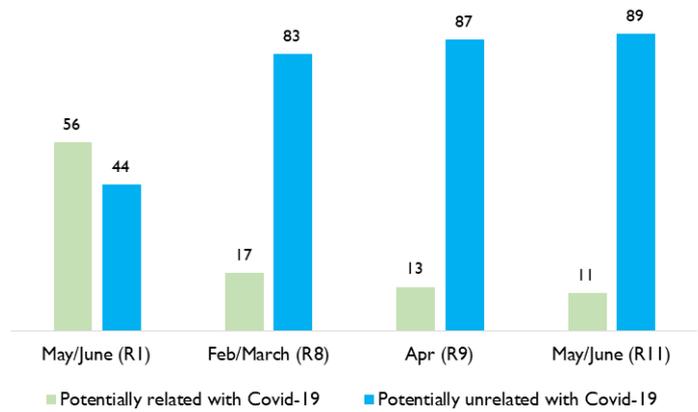
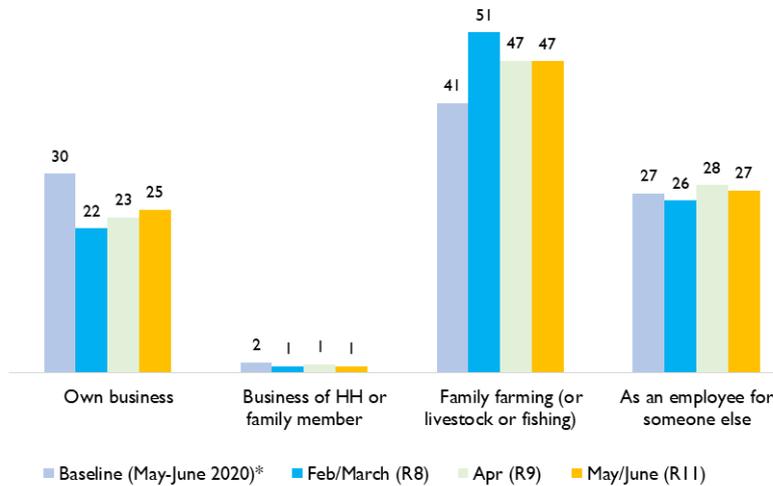


Figure 4. Type of Work (% of Respondents who are working)

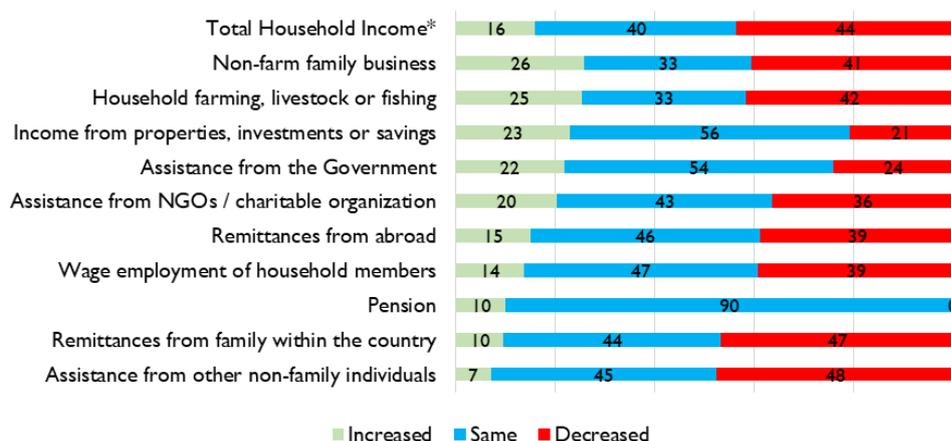


In June 2021, the proportion of people employed has stayed almost consistent over the last 11 rounds of the survey: (27%). While those working in farming (47%) has surpassed the proportion reported during the Round 1 when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in Malawi. Nonetheless, people who own businesses (25%) are still below what was observed in Round 1 (30%).

Overtime, a lower proportion of non-farm businesses that have closed temporarily, reported COVID-19 related reasons. In June, the figure was 50%, which is below the 70% observed at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi. In contrast, for permanent closures; COVID-19 related reasons have continuously been reported as the main cause for closing (70%).

Many households reported reductions in income (43%) and only 16% report increases by June 2021. Nevertheless, COVID-19 is still the main reason for having reductions in income. By income sources, more people report reductions in assistance from friends, remittances within the country and household businesses (farm and non-farm) in contrast to those that report increases in the same items.

Figure 5. Changes in Income (% of households with income from each source)



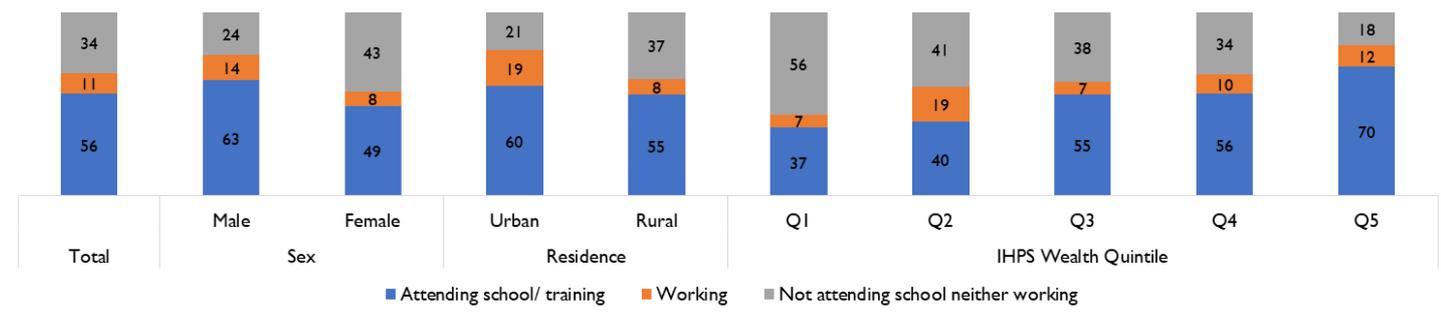


According to the 2018 Malawi population and housing census, the youths (aged 15 to 25 years) made up about 40% of the working age population (aged 15 to 64 years).

In May 2021, the employment information and future aspirations were collected from selected youths in the household. One youth (aged 15 to 25 years) was randomly selected in every household and efforts were made to speak to only the selected respondent and in instances where this was not possible, the interview was not conducted.

34% of the selected youth were neither working nor attending school. Youth from poorer households reported not attending school and not working more than their counterparts from richer households; 56% and 18% respectively. Conversely, youths from richer households, reported a higher incidence in school participation (70%) compared to their counterparts from the poorer households (37%).

Fig 6. Percentage of youth according main activity (% of youth respondents 15-25 years old)



AGRICULTURE

The share of households that engaged in agriculture during COVID-19 pandemic period (2020/2021) increased by 10% compared to the period before COVID-19 (2018/2019). Significant increase occurred in northern Malawi (29%), followed by Southern Malawi (9%) and least was in Central (5%). The top four crops cultivated before COVID-19 were Maize, Vegetables like Nkhwani, Groundnuts, and Pigeon peas. However, during the COVID-19 period the top four cultivated crops are Maize, Groundnuts, Peas, and Soyabeans. With exception of maize and peas, there was a decline in the share of households cultivating other top four crops as households diversify to other crops like Irish potatoes, sugar cane, and cassava.

Figure 7. Share of households who were engaged in agriculture before and after COVID-19

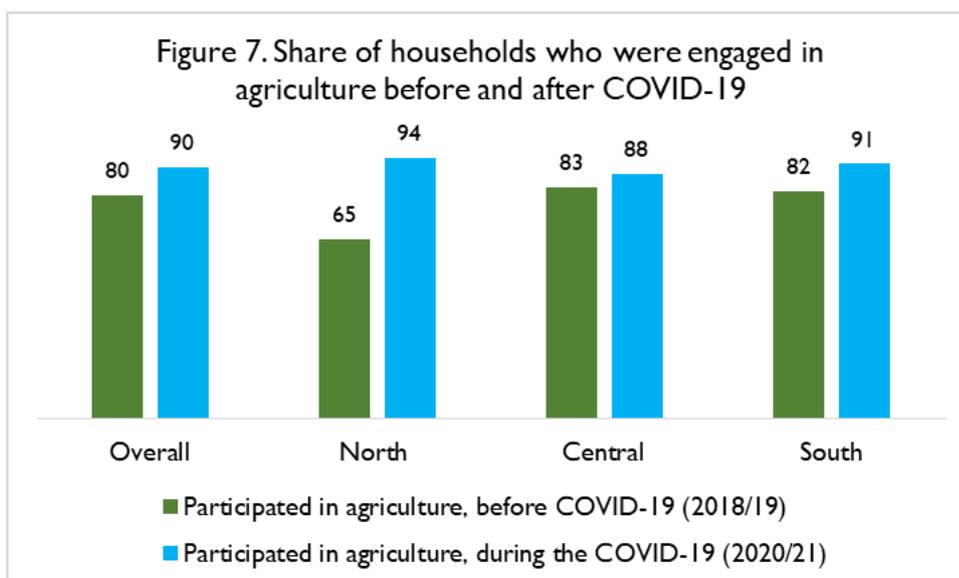
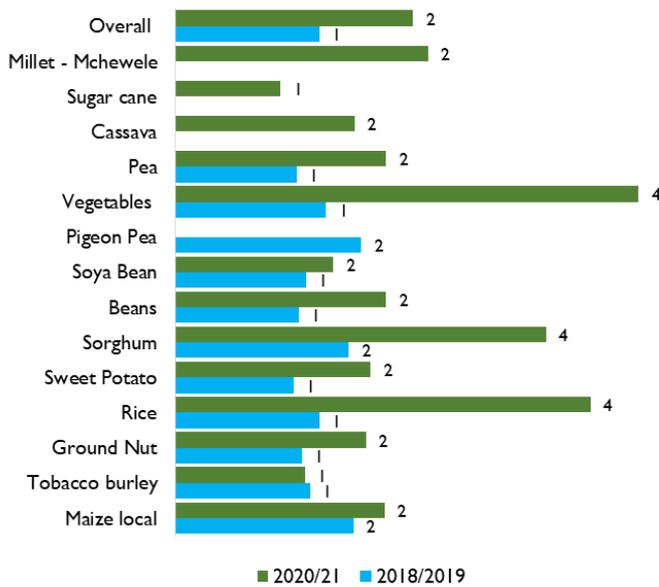




Figure 8. Average Number of plots cultivated before COVID-19 (2018/2019) and during COVID-19 (2020/2021) by crop (% of households that cultivated in respective seasons)



Overall, the average number of plots cultivated by households before COVID-19 (2018/19) per crop was one plot and during the COVID-19 period (2020/21) the average number plots per crop was two plots. Vegetables, rice and sorghum had the highest increase in the number of plots and had highest number of plots as shown in figure 8. This could be probably because households cultivate the crops for sale to earn income. Before COVID-19 pandemic, the crops with highest number of plots were maize, pigeon peas and sorghum. However, during the COVID-19 period very few households reported cultivating pigeon peas. This could be because households are diversifying to marketable crops like crops like millet, cassava and sugar cane which have emerged strongly during COVID-19 period. The average number of cassava and millet plots is two while average number of the sugarcane plots is one. The average size of the plot during COVID-19 was 1.7 acres while before COVID-19 the average was 1.9 acres.

The share of households using organic fertilizers, pesticides, hired labour and animal traction increased during the COVID-19 period compared to before COVID-19 while share of households using inorganic fertilizers declined. The increase use of the hired labour, animal traction and pesticides could be linked to the increase in the number of plots of crops cultivated while the increase in the use of organic fertilizers use could be linked to the decline in the use of inorganic fertilizers. The main reasons for the decline in fertilizer is associated with liquidity constraints and price increases probable arising from transportation and fertilizer importation costs during the lock down.

Figure 9. Incidence of input use during and before COVID-19 in Malawi (% of households that cultivated in respective seasons)

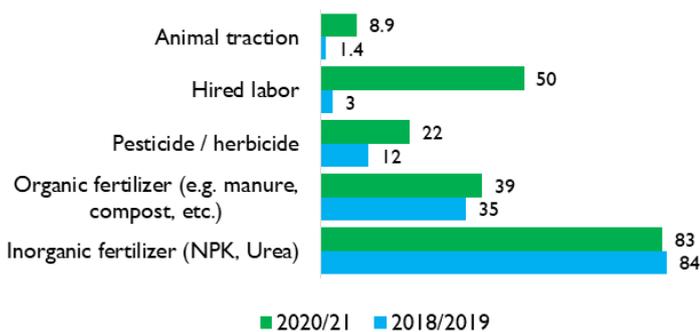
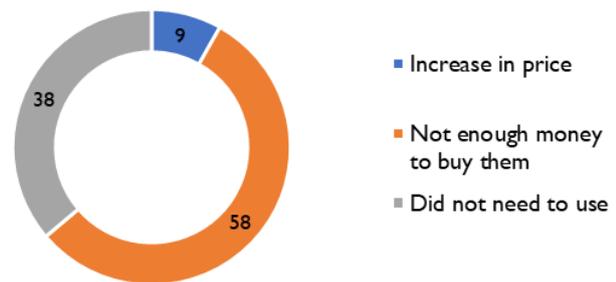


Figure 10. Reasons of not being able to use inorganic fertilizers during COVID-19 (% of households that cultivated)



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. These surveys are the tenth and eleventh of a planned 12 rounds of the survey, 1,136 baseline households were conducted during round 10, with 919 fully interviewed. 1,699 households from the baseline were contacted and 1,541 households were fully interviewed in the eleventh round. These same households will be contacted in subsequent rounds of the HFPS COVID-19. 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/lsms-covid19> and email enquiries@statistics.gov.mw.