

09 July 2020



Rapid information *from* household high-frequency monitoring

Summary of Results from Round 1
18 MAY 2020 — 03 JUNE 2020



This brief presents the main findings from the first of eight rounds of a nationally representative survey of 1,500 randomly selected households in all states/regions of Myanmar. The surveys were undertaken by conducting a 20-minute phone call between 18 May 2020 and 03 June 2020.

Key Messages



Adverse impacts on employment and labor income are significant. In half of the households surveyed, the main worker was not working in the last seven days. Since the end of March 2020, half of those still at work have experienced a decrease in income.



Households have less diversified livelihood sources. Participation in activities outside the household and in household businesses has declined, as have remittances.



Food security is not yet worrisome, but may become a concern for households who report limiting food consumption to cope with income shocks associated with COVID-19.



Myanmar's economy is expected to suffer greatly from the impacts of COVID-19. The global economic slowdown and national measures adopted to contain the outbreak are expected to result in GDP growth declining to a mere 0.5 percent in fiscal year 2019/2020¹. This crisis is expected to adversely affect households' livelihoods. The pandemic and related containment measures have been disrupting economic activity in large employment sectors such as whole-sale and retail trade, tourism-related services, manufacturing, and construction. As a result, households may suffer loss of employment or reductions in income. They could risk falling into poverty and facing challenges relating to food security.

Up-to-date evidence is key to assess the impact of the crisis and thus inform policies to protect poor and vulnerable households. In the absence of living conditions data more recent than 2017, the Myanmar Central Statistical Organization (CSO) and the World Bank partnered to conduct a high-frequency phone survey on households, with the aim of monitoring changes in employment, incomes, and poverty since March 2020.

In more than half of households, the main worker was unemployed. More than six

out of ten households' main workers engaged as casual labor in agriculture were not working in the last seven days. The same is true for 50 percent of those engaged in construction. Household breadwinners engaged in manufacturing and retail fare only mildly better: about 45 percent of them have not worked in the last seven days. Only four percent of households' main workers have switched jobs since March 2020.

Among those still employed, income losses are widespread across all sectors of employment, except public administration. Overall, more than half of households' main workers who are still working saw their income decline since March 2020. Across all sectors, between 50 and 68 percent of workers experienced a reduction in earnings. Only workers employed in "other services", which include public administration, have managed to maintain stable incomes.

Family-run small businesses were badly hit. They have been particularly exposed, as 60 percent of them are in the retail trade sector. Eight out of 10 reported earning less or no income at all since March 2020. The same is true for personal service businesses and agricultural businesses, but these represent a relatively small proportion of businesses.

In addition, a large share of farming households has not been able to perform

regular farming activities nor to plant rice since virus containment measures were introduced. About half of households have a farm activity and plant rice (43 percent of farming households). But these farming households and – more worryingly – rice-growing farmers, have not been able to perform activities typical of this time of the year: 75 percent of rice-growing farmers have not started planting rice for the upcoming season. All rice-growing farmers report being unable to work as much as would be required for a successful rice harvest. They add that delays in rain onsets are an additional concern.

Households have less diversified livelihood sources. Before March 2020, 17 percent of households were engaged in two sectors and about 13 percent did not work in any sector. After March 2020, about 8 percent of households are engaged in two sectors whereas the share of household with no livelihood generating activity has risen sharply to 21 percent. In addition, households have lost non-labor income through a significant decline in remittances. With the return of Myanmar migrants from abroad since early March, three out of four households who usually receive remittances have received less or no remittances.

Food security is an emerging concern as households report reducing their food consumption to cope with income losses. Even after March 2020, most households have been able to buy rice and protein (chicken). However, in 11 percent of households, at least one adult member has eaten less than usual in the last 30 days. Over the same period, 7 percent of households have reportedly run out of food. About half of households report reducing their food consumption to cope with shocks, which threatens food security and human development in the long term. Since March 2020, only 15 percent of households received food assistance from the government.

¹ Myanmar Economic Monitor: Myanmar in the Time of COVID-19: Myanmar Economic Monitor June 2020 (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/806001593183687694/Myanmar-Economic-Monitor-Myanmar-in-the-Time-of-COVID-19>

