Community perceptions of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 in Myanmar

Insights from round 3 of the National COVID-19 Community Survey (NCCS) – August and September 2020

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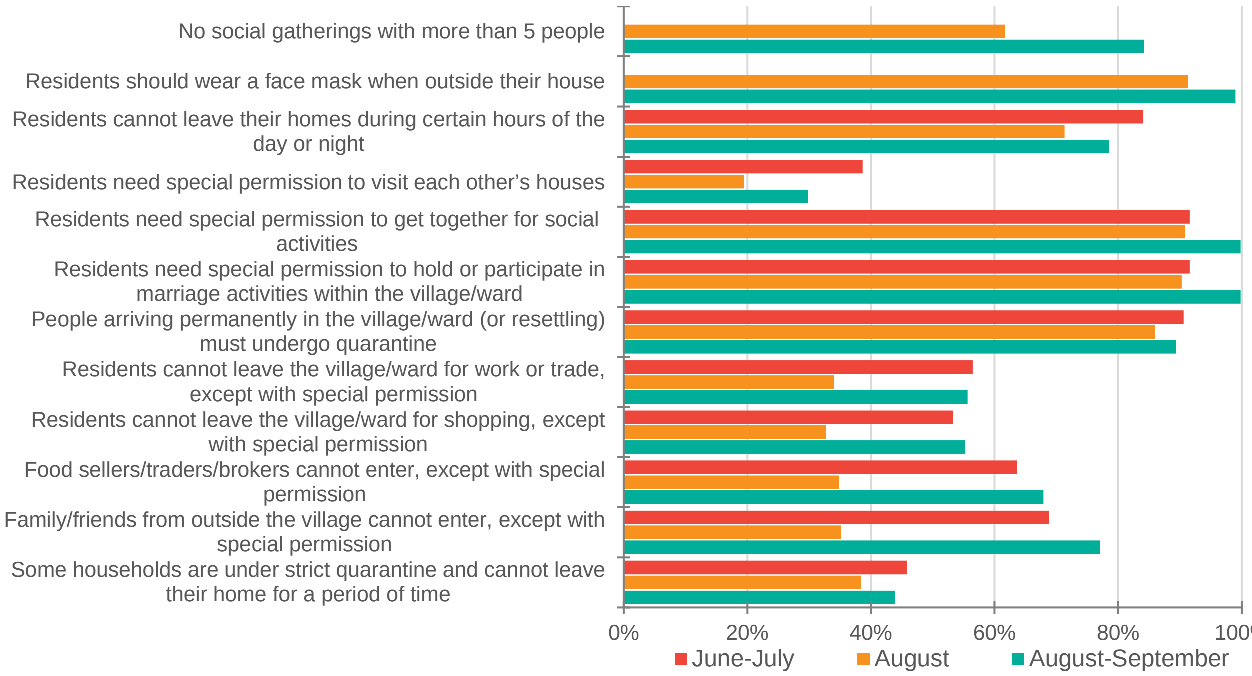
Introduction

To better understand the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on Myanmar's diverse rural and urban communities, a multi-round large-scale community telephone survey is being conducted. The first round of the survey took place in June and July 2020, while the second round was done in August. This report focuses on key findings from the third round of survey done in August and September 2020. The survey obtained information from community respondents that had participated in the first or second rounds as well as from additional communities. In total, the third round obtained responses from 186 townships across Myanmar.

Key findings

- **Renewed implementation of COVID-19 prevention measures**. The COVID-19 prevention measures in place in August and September resemble the situation of June and July, being more stringently applied than was reported in the second round earlier in August. For example, 77 percent of communities reported that family and friends from outside the village could not enter their village or ward, compared to 64 percent in the June and July round and 35 percent in the second round earlier in August (Figure 1). In nearly all communities it was reported that there were restrictions on gatherings, such as weddings or other social activities, and that wearing of face masks is mandatory outside the home.

Figure 1. COVID-19 prevention measures in place, percent of communities by survey round

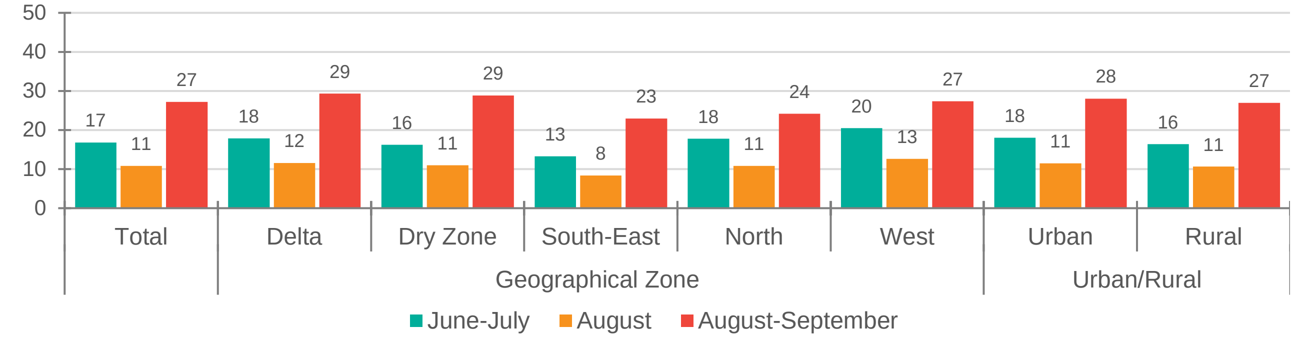


- **Community respondents perceive increasing extreme poverty.**[1] Whereas on average 17 percent of households were judged by the community respondents to be extremely poor in June and July and only 11 percent in August, the respondents now report that on average 27 percent of households in their

[1] Extremely poor households are those by the respondent's estimation to be suffering from hunger and in urgent need of assistance.

communities are extremely poor (Figure 2). Respondents mention reduced income due to less work or lower wages for non-farm workers and less income from non-farm businesses as the primary reasons for the higher prevalence of extremely poor households in the most recent survey round.

Figure 2. Average estimated percentage of households in need of urgent assistance in each community, by survey round and geography



- **Social protection comes increasingly in the form of cash-based assistance, but a steep drop is seen in cash for work schemes**. Government assistance received prior to June and July was mostly in the form of food, but has since changed to predominantly non-food assistance. Almost all communities reported receiving food assistance and 20 percent receiving non-food assistance in June and July. By August and September non-food assistance increased to 91 percent of the interviewed communities. Cash for work schemes were reported by 26 percent of communities in June and July and 19 percent in August. However, in the last survey round, only 2 percent reported that they continued to have such schemes.
- **Agricultural production and sales activities continue facing challenges**. One-third of the surveyed communities reported that the production of farmers in their community had been lower than normal in August and September, compared to 48 percent in June and July and 42 percent in August. Bad weather, pests, and low output prices were the reasons given for the lower production. Similar to levels reported in the August round, disruptions of agricultural sales activities were noted in 24 percent of communities, mainly due to low output prices, insufficient traders or brokers, and COVID-19 related mobility restrictions.
- **Weather shocks and water supply shortages**. Nineteen percent of communities in August and September reported being affected by bad weather in the previous month, compared to 34 percent in June and July and 40 percent in August. Fourteen percent of communities reported insufficient drinking water supply and 29 percent insufficient water for irrigation. Such effects are more important in rural communities.

Policy recommendations

- Continue raising awareness on the importance of following COVID-19 prevention measures.
- With rising poverty, it is critically important to scale up social protection measures for the most vulnerable populations and to continue monitoring these programs to make sure they are reaching vulnerable populations. Creating job opportunities and devising strategies to maintain or resume non-farm business operations under COVID-19 are needed to reverse poverty trends, including the continued and safe implementation of cash-for-work programs for vulnerable populations.
- Disruptions to agricultural marketing continue to be a major concern. Regardless of whether agricultural marketing activities are deemed as low, medium, or high risk from a COVID-19 perspective, it is important both to implement prevention measures where feasible and to allow agricultural transactions to proceed as smoothly as possible to enable farming households to maintain their livelihoods and all households to access the food they require.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MOALI) and its development partners should closely monitor crop pests, establish disaster risk reduction measures, continue to support irrigation to avoid low agricultural production, and continue the supply of drinking water in rural areas. Moreover, agricultural input and output markets must be monitored to avoid disruptions to supply and disincentives to production.

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