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The road to recovery: Smallholder household resilience to food insecurity amidst climate-change and COVID-19-induced shocks

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures instituted to curb its spread had devastating effects on livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa where smallholder farmers were already grappling with the effects of climate change. The disruptions in transport and inaccessibility to both agricultural input and produce markets resulting from the lockdowns increased the susceptibility of the farming households to food insecurity. In Uganda, the government provided relief in form of a one-off supply of food and cash to a small part of the peri-urban population. In the absence of social protection, rural farming households in the country had to bank on their resilience capacity to cope with the myriad of shocks. The objective of this research was threefold; to analyse the effects of climate change and COVID-19-related shocks on the food security status of rural smallholder households, evaluate the determinants of their resilience to food insecurity amidst the shocks and, assess the role of their resilience capacity in facilitating recovery. The data used is from a panel of three waves of household surveys collected in western Uganda before the pandemic, during a lockdown and afterward. We employed factor analysis, structural equation modelling and probit models for the empirical analysis. The findings show that 40% of the households consumed less diverse diets whereas 52% experienced a reduction in food consumption per capita during the pandemic. Shocks including loss of employment, death of a relative due to COVID-19, disruptions in transport and increased prices of foodstuffs were associated with a decline in the household food security status. The coping strategies employed such as change in dietary patterns, reduced expenditure on foodstuff and distress sales of livestock as indicated by 34%, 28% and 10% of the households respectively further threatened their food security status. Ownership of productive and non-productive assets and access to social safety nets such as remittances and belonging to associations were the major contributors to household resilience. Furthermore, household resilience was significantly and positively related to the likelihood of recovery of the food security status over time. Households with a higher resilience capacity index were better equipped to absorb and adapt to shocks.

Keywords: Climate change, COVID-19, food insecurity, households, recovery, resilience, rural, shocks, smallholder