SOCIAL REPRODUCTION ANALYSIS WORKSHOP REPORT

Hall;

;

© 2022, PLAAS

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction, provided the original work is properly credited.

Cette œuvre est mise à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode), qui permet l'utilisation, la distribution et la reproduction sans restriction, pourvu que le mérite de la création originale soit adéquatement reconnu.

IDRC Grant/ Subvention du CRDI: 109580-001-The impacts of COVID-19 responses on the political economy of African food systems (COVID-19-AFS)

"The Impacts of COVID-19 Responses on the Political Economy of African Food Systems"

Social Reproduction Analysis Workshop Report

04 May 2021

This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors.

Table of Contents

Social Reproduction Workshop Programme 3
1. Social reproduction analysis: An overview 5
 2.1 Ghana: Preliminary findings on social reproduction and the food system under Covid-19 6
 2.2 Tanzania: Preliminary findings on social reproduction and the food system under Covid-19 .. 8
 2.3 South Africa: Preliminary findings on social reproduction and the food system under Covid-19 9
3. Preliminary findings on particular aspects of social reproduction in relation to the food system 10
 3.1 Children, school, time and mobility/transport 10
 3.2 Food procurement, preparation, quality and quantity 11
 3.3 Remittances and movement of family members 12
 3.4 Community and state support 12
4. Discussion and concluding remarks 13

COVID-19 and African Food Systems

Social Reproduction Workshop Programme

Zoom link

Start time: 11.00 (Ghana) 13.00 (SA) 14.00 (Tanzania)*
End time: 13.30 (Ghana) 15.30 (SA) 16.30 (Tanzania)

1.	**Welcome**	**5 mins**
2.	**Introduction to concepts & arguments (Akosua)**	**15 mins**
3.	**Country teams: what did we find in our data?**	**45 mins**

- 3 x 15 minute prepared inputs from country teams: insights and examples
- *How did COVID regulatory and support responses (or absence of them) affect social reproductive roles, labour and time among food system actors – and how did people respond, react or challenge this?*

4.	**Open discussion**	**15 mins**
5.	**Breakout rooms:**	**30 mins**

- children, school, time & mobility/transport
- food procurement, preparation, quality & quantity
- remittances/movement of family members
- community & state support

* *Please sign up for the breakout rooms in the table below.*

6. Plenary discussion **20 mins**

- Key points of commonality & difference
- How all the above impacted on women's positions in the food system; voice/power in households; shifts in spheres of production & reproduction

7. Webinar preparation **10 mins**

- What are the emerging 3 country stories?
- What are our provisional views about the different outcomes that a hard lockdown / medium / no lockdown produces in different pre-existing food systems?
- What do we need to investigate further in the next phase of research?

1. Social reproduction analysis: An overview

Social reproduction theory seeks to consider the economy in a unitary way, in particular in relation to how what happens at work and at home influence each other. It considers how workers are produced, not just how goods are produced. Under social reproduction theory, labour power is viewed as a commodity that is produced outside the circuits of production, that is, at home. Under this perspective, the work of reproduction, of creating labour power, which is undertaken by women in families and by healthcare and educational systems, has significant use value. In the home, such work is often unwaged, and may not be that valued – but without it, production cannot happen. The work of social reproduction may be quite invisible, but it makes production possible.

American philosopher and critical theorist Nancy Fraser has argued that the value of social reproduction has shifted over time under three stages of capitalism. In the 19th century, under liberal competitive capitalism, the division between production and social reproduction was made formal and concretised, producing a new dominant ideological framework for the economy and society. In this separation, value was placed on production and less value was placed on reproduction. During the second phase of state-managed capitalism in the 20th century, governments and firms together paid greater attention to the social welfare of workers. The idea of a family wage, that is the obligation to pay workers enough to enable them to provide for their families, emerged; and states provided healthcare, education and parks in an effort to offer support, and share the burden and costs of social reproduction. However, during the third, current phase under the financialised capitalism of the 21st century, women have been incorporated into the production side of things but no significant provision is being made to support social reproduction, as the state retreats from its social welfare function. Adult family members need to work harder and harder to make ends meet, with women increasingly facing a double burden of paid-work and domestic responsibilities. In their efforts to ensure that workers focus on production rather that reproduction during their most productive (youthful) years, large firms have promoted a number of innovative schemes, such as encouraging women to freeze their eggs for later and promoting the use of high-technology double-breast pumps so that infants can be provided with nutrition in a more efficient way. In addition, in the Global North, migrants and people of colour, the so-called "servants of globalisation", have increasingly filled the domestic void produced under the new system.

However, Fraser's analysis takes little account of the conditions for social reproduction in Africa and the rest of the Global South, which while providing a mobile workforce to support bourgeois lifestyles in the Global North, cannot themselves leverage the availability of such labour power in the same way. Indeed, Ghanaian working mothers working abroad are forced to "post", that is, send back, their babies to be looked after by carers in Ghana due to a lack of sufficient maternity leave and the expense of child care in the Global North.

More broadly, the development of capitalism has been experienced quite differently in the Global South than in the Global North. For example, a family or living wage was not provided to most families in the Global South during the second stage of capitalism outlined by Fraser. In addition, there is a large surplus population, including the elderly and the next, younger generation, who need to be looked after in the Global South.

In reflecting on the nature of the economy in the Global South, three main classes of labour may be identified. First, there is the subsistence labour force, who undertake production for social reproduction purposes. This includes an agrarian class working to reproduce the next generation. For example, in northern Ghana, farmers store their outputs in barns so that they can live off what they produce. Second, there is the class of workers engaged in petty commodity production. For this group, wages and profits are indistinguishable, since its members are not making enough to get ahead. This class comprises a visible male force and a largely invisible female force engaged in reproductive work, although there are also cases of women involved in this productive workforce. Third, there is a class of wage labourers who earn too little to fund the production of the next generation of workers on their own, which is a job left to be undertaken by the (largely unpaid) female workforce.

According to Lyn Ossome and Sirisha Naidu, the survival and sustenance of the agrarian class in the context of a large surplus population is a key dynamic shaping the participation of women in the labour force in the Global South, whereas, in the Global North, women's work is mainly shaped by a relationship of exploitation. In this analysis, women as workers in the Global South generally have to ensure social reproduction outside the circuit of production. Their main responsibility is to ensure that land and the commons produce food, which they may then use, accumulate or sell, using the proceeds either to purchase other things or to ensure the necessary access to land in the continued quest for sustenance.

Against this background, a big question facing this study is: How does a pandemic reconfigure social reproduction in the Global South?

2. Country analysis

2.1 Ghana: Preliminary findings on social reproduction and the food system under Covid-19

In terms of the national socio-economic base, poverty affects about 25% of Ghana's population and people's savings have been further depleted by a banking crisis which took place five years ago. The level of state support for social reproduction is quite minimal. There is a basic grant providing the equivalent of between $10 to $24 a quarter, and a national health insurance programme which provides some help to half of the country's women, as well as a school feeding programme which is accessed by a quarter of the population.

Under Covid-19, the food system has been greatly damaged. Although the hard lockdown was only for three weeks, the government restrictions clearly affected incomes as did the closure of markets and schools. During May 2020, about half the population complained of drains on their cash and food supplies; by August/September the number of those complaining about cash and food shortages had dropped to between 26.8% and 36.8%. Some people were really squeezed, others less so.

In terms of mitigation measures, there was some limited access to favourable loans, as well as some free electricity. There were other government efforts, such as the declared provision of free water services, but most people didn't benefit from this initiative due to a general lack or reticulation in the

home. Only 22% of the population benefited from the provision of free water which is needed to cook and to clean and is this crucial for care efforts, while about 75% benefited from the free electricity. The inequity of supply in this regard indicates how the country's weak infrastructure has undermined the state's efforts to provide relief.

In the absence of state support, households adopted a number of survival strategies. Many food actors undertook a range of activities to make ends meet. So, for example, a plantain seller in Accra and a rice distributor in Techiman both also reported holding interests in cocoa production. A cooked rice vendor in Accra reported sending rice and fish back home to her village, while her mother brought her cassava and plantain. There was also support from the community, although this mainly took the form of childcare rather than food supplies after the initial three-week lockdown had passed. People relied on neighbours looking after their children and making sure that they didn't get into trouble, so that they could go to work. Meanwhile, those unable to access the necessary food aid from the church or the state, were able to source it from their friends through barter.

In many cases, women were increasingly forced to subsidise the household. Although food was still being put on the table, the means for achieving this changed. As the housekeeping money provided by men was reduced, women were forced to eat into the capital set aside for their businesses in order to address domestic needs. Others took out loans from the informal rotating credit system (*susu*) to meet shortfalls in household budgets.

In addition, households increasingly talked about reducing the amount of food being eaten, including by reducing the number of meals and how much rice was served at each meal. Many people used only to have to worry about preparing two meals a day since their children could access nutrition through the school-feeding programme; but once this scheme was suspended, they had to worry about making three meals a day, which they couldn't afford. People talked about the stress of feeding the children and looking after them all the time. In many households, it now became the norm to serve only lunch and dinner.

Meanwhile, both the quantity and quality of the food being prepared declined. Many people dropped the protein, the fish component from their meals; and soup (which is generally based on some form of protein in Ghanaian cooking) disappeared from the diet of a large part of the population.

Tensions with care work mounted as children were unable to go to school for months on end. Children were either cooped up at home or at the neighbour's. Some women shared the childcare work with the children's fathers; but in general, the additional childcare burden restricted parental activities, however it was shared. The option for many women traders was either to take their children to the market so that they could do some business, or leave them at home where they were liable to get into trouble. Such women were increasingly torn between their productive work (selling for long hours at the market) and their care work (returning home early to tend the children).

Meanwhile, many children became used to the absence of their parents and found ways of entertaining themselves at home or by playing on the streets at the market, with the consequence that they were deprived of any educational support and risked failing at school and having to repeat the year.

In an effort to address the problem, the state provided some, limited, free tuition during the ten-month break from schooling. However, this teaching which was broadcast in the form of 30-minute lessons, was unavailable to families without the necessary equipment or an electricity supply at

home. In addition, it wasn't an all-day programme. So, parents with the resources hired private tutors; while others put their elder daughters to work teaching their younger siblings.

A further concern raised by civil society organisations has been the welfare of teenage girls stuck at home for months. In this regard, new teenage pregnancy statistics of 100,000 need to be compared with the numbers for the preceding year.

Another important area of enquiry is the flow of remittances and other forms of support, including food itself, between rural and urban areas, although preliminary findings have indicated that young urban residents continued to send money home to rural family members.

2.2 Tanzania: Preliminary findings on social reproduction and the food system under Covid-19

The position of the Tanzanian government has moved from one of denialism to the appointment of a scientific committee to advise on how it should respond to the pandemic. Under the previous government of former president John Magufuli, there were no great lockdowns and restrictions on movement. Nevertheless, despite the relative lack of government restrictions on movement and on how business was conducted, many people – particularly among marginalised groups – were still affected by the Covid-19 disruption, in part as a result of ripple effects from the drops in tourism and trade, indicating how intricately the country's various economic sectors are interwoven.

Against this background, families particularly in poorer households also faced additional social reproduction responsibilities. For example, when the government closed schools between March and May 2020, women, in fulfilling their social roles as the primary care givers, either had to stay at home or come back early from work to look after the children. Some mothers took their children to the workplace – for example, to supermarkets. Other mothers left the children at home because they were unable to look after them *and* take care of business. In some cases, the children had to participate in income-generation activities. In general, the quality of childcare suffered.

In relation to learning, the government engaged the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation to produce educational programmes for children staying at home, although some families could not afford televisions and were thus unable to access these lessons. In one case from the field research, a family reported buying books to support education; while others reported hiring teachers for private tuition via WhatsApp.

For poorer households, the economic impacts of the pandemic damaged livelihoods and undermined food procurement and preparation efforts. As household budgets were cut, the amount and quality of food at home was reduced. The closure of schools, and the school-feeding programme, added to the domestic food burden.

In the absence of any significant state support, social and informal networks were deployed by households. For example, food traders in the cities generally dispatched remittances to their rural relatives. This study needs to interrogate the operation of these networks further.

2.3 South Africa: Preliminary findings on social reproduction and the food system under Covid-19

In considering the inter-relationship between social reproduction and production under Covid-19, the research teams in South Africa have sought to interrogate how production and trading activities have shifted as a result of the pandemic and the responses to it, and how all of this has affected what is happening in households, including in terms of labour and time. In conducting this research, it is important, instead of thinking of social reproduction and production as separate worlds – that is, the public and the private – to look at how these domains connect and shape one another. In considering the changes wrought under Covid-19, a key point of interest is how people may have challenged the gendered divisions of labour. For example, how the regulations introduced by the government have produced a reproductive squeeze on people's time and resources, but also how people have pushed back against and sought to renegotiate domestic and productive roles as a result. In considering the relationship between social reproduction and production, the researchers in South Africa have been able to access some national data on food and hunger and on social grants, which can provide important baseline information, including on how the state has provided some support.

Children, school, time and mobility/transport

The closure of some schools and of school-feeding programmes placed an additional burden on households at a time when incomes were squeezed. The day-long presence of children who were no longer at school placed additional childcare responsibilities on women, raising questions about how and where these responsibilities should be undertaken – for example, whether the children should accompany the women out to the fields or to market; or whether women should stay at home with their children given the risk of leaving them alone and the relative unaffordability of paid childcare.

In some cases, efforts to share the reproductive labour across generations seem to have been made. For example, some teenage girls were obliged to take on greater social reproduction responsibilities – and, in some cases, may have been unable to attend to their own schoolwork as a result. In another example, women in cities sent their children back to their grandmothers in rural home spaces for lack of sufficient resources to take care of them themselves. Meanwhile, better-off households which could afford to employ people were found to have managed the change in domestic arrangements more effectively. However, in all of this, the extent to which women have challenged gender divisions and been able to engage men in taking on more domestic labour is unclear.

The validity of these findings on shifting social reproduction arrangements is limited by a broad lack of quantitative data on the issue. In response, the research should seek to uncover counter examples to provide a broader picture, as well as sharpening its focus on: gender divisions of labour in the household and how such labour is organised; domestic violence concerns, which have been discerned but not in any systematic way; the factors sustaining gendered labour for social reproduction – for example, whether it is a matter of coercion or one of love and affinity; and how children have and have not been able to move into spaces of production and trade.

Food procurement, preparation, quality and quantity

This topic entails considering how the work of obtaining and preparing food has changed. Preliminary findings have indicated that a food commons was established during the initial lockdown. Community action networks were forged and food donations were sponsored. However, the scale and extent of such initiatives diminished rapidly as government restrictions were relaxed;

and the aid was rapidly withdrawn, leaving many people on diminished incomes in need. In addition, people on reduced incomes shifted to eating lower-quality foods, although they generally continued to eat about the same amount. This tendency was reinforced by government efforts – for example, after the government was taken to court when it stopped its school-feeding programme, it replaced the scheme with parcels which offered a more limited selection of lower-quality food. Meanwhile, there has also been a dietary shift to super foods such as ginger and garlic alongside fresh produce and a reduction in the amount of protein being consumed. The research needs to interrogate dietary issues more closely and seek to source more hard data from food suppliers on this.

Remittances and movement of family members
This topic entails considering how the costs of social reproduction have shifted spatially, with money not only going back to rural areas, but people also returning to these home spaces and, in some cases, rural areas funding urban households. In this regard, the research should interrogate further the double burden of return migration, which is the loss of remittances from the young people in the cities which were provided to support extended rural families, combined with family members returning and needing to be fed. Again, in all of the this, the additional labour in taking responsibility for social reproduction has come from younger and older women rather than any change in men's roles.

Community and state support
The state has provided significant if patchy support, although preliminary findings indicate that many people, including small-scale food producers, were unaware of the kinds of grants available to them. In addition, the grants appear to have been delivered in ways which have failed to alleviate hardship. For example, Covid-19 grants were not made available to care-givers in receipt of child-support payments and grants which had been made to unemployed people to relieve distress were prematurely axed.

A further concern has been that small-scale and informal producers were bypassed as suppliers of food in the aid which was procured and distributed by corporate donors and community and faith-based organisations. Instead, the aid was sourced from commercial value chains.

3. Preliminary findings on particular aspects of social reproduction in relation to the food system

3.1 Children, school, time and mobility/transport

A number of key issues were raised under this topic:

- Impacts on nutrition: The numbers of children and household members who were malnourished during the pandemic should be established. In this regard, the ongoing repercussions of school nutrition programmes being closed should be assessed.
- The flexibility of the different actors in the food system: Although informal farmers and traders had different, additional burdens they had to balance under Covid-19, the fluidity of their production and social reproduction responsibilities nevertheless enabled survival. At

the same time, the question of precisely how flexible they could be – for example, whether traders could take their children to market – and the trade-offs involved need to be carefully analysed.

- The longer-term impacts on women's role in the food systems given their increased social reproduction responsibilities under Covid-19: Some women have stopped trading and have lost their space in the market place as a result. The question here is whether they can re-establish themselves in these spaces, which may depend on whether they can acquire the required capital, as well as other factors controlling access.
- The quality of childcare: Many children were deprived of care because it was unaffordable or because their parents were in the fields/at the market for a long time. Many parents felt that they had little control over this aspect of social reproduction. The long-term implications of a lack of childcare, such as teenage pregnancies should be assessed.
- Relative impacts on urban and rural households: There were greater job losses in urban areas, and more households with available arable land in rural areas. In this context, the two-way transfers of money and food and the movement of people between these two areas took on a different character under lockdown.

3.2 Food procurement, preparation, quality and quantity

In South Africa, the state and communities provided food parcels which had a relatively high nutritional value. At the same time, communities adjusted their patterns of buying and selling food under the pandemic. For example, many small-scale fishers would sell their high-quality food – their catch – and then use the money from this to buy larger quantities of low-quality food which would feed the household for a longer period of time.

In Ghana, cash shortages damaged the use of credit in the informal food system. Traders selling food on credit have yet to be paid. Many of them were also unable to access produce from farmers for which they had paid in advance during the early lockdown period when the movement of goods and people was restricted. Although the farmers had been paid in many cases, the crops were left to perish in the field or in storage. Conversely, those traders who were able to secure the produce for which they had paid, made a great profit given the inflated food prices under lockdown – although these profits quickly disappeared when they had to replenish their stocks.

The quality and quantity of the food consumed in Ghana, particularly in the form of fish protein, shifted under Covid-19. Ghanaians normally eat a lot of fish each year – 25kg per person. Much of this is small fish such as anchovies which are used when higher quality fish such as Tilapia are unavailable. But even these smaller fish have become unaffordable – and soup is now served without fish or not at all.

3.3 Remittances and movement of family members

The findings from the research indicate circular patterns of migration and two-way flows of remittances between rural and urban areas under Covid-19, shaped by a number of factors, including the availability of jobs, livelihoods, labour and grants and the ability to flexibly adapt.

In Ghana, there was little return migration to rural areas but there was an increase in remittances. Some of these were sent from rural families to young people in urban areas; and there was also a huge influx of remittances from Europe despite job losses there.

In South Africa also, many migrants to the cities remained in urban areas despite losses of income. Here, the pattern seemed to be that young people who had lost formal jobs were more likely to return to their rural home spaces than those who had lost incomes in the informal sector. It may be that this latter group remained despite the setbacks in the hope that their capacity to make a plan and find another way of making a living would see them through – although they stopped remitting as a result of their straitened circumstances. There may also have been negative pressure to stay based on the understanding that the prospects of being able to forge an urban livelihood diminish once a migrant goes away for a while.

Meanwhile, those returning to rural areas in search of socio- economic safety net depleted household budgets by increasing the number of mouths to feed at the same time that they brought additional labour, both for social reproduction and for farming. In this regard, returning migrants who brought social grants with them were more able to relieve the economic strain that their arrival created.

In Tanzania, there was not a lot of actual movement back to rural areas. Instead, new communications technologies were increasingly used to address livelihood gaps. A lot of remittances were sent electronically and Facebook and Instagram were increasingly used to trade food. In addition, many younger people increasingly sought to sell food locally.

3.4 Community and state support

In Ghana, under the initial lockdown of a number of hotspots, there was some support in the form of free water and electricity, although this could not be accessed without meters or reticulation. There was also some distribution of food packages and parcels, but only in the Accra region. No special grants were issued, although the government sought to ease access to existing grants via cell phone applications. Meanwhile, the school-feeding programmes which were run by local caretakers buying from small-scale (women) traders accrued debt, which has created knock-on effects across the food system as these traders subsequently lacked the cash to buy more produce.

In Tanzania, there was no supportive response from the state. Schools were closed between March and May 2020, although markets remained open. Some aid for poor households was provided by the World Bank; and the country's central bank also offered support, although little of this trickled down. Meanwhile, women, who generally led the community solidarity efforts and were forced to adopt multiple roles due to a lack of state support, bore the brunt of social reproduction responsibilities in the home.

In South Africa, the state provided some support in the form of a Covid-19 grant and an increased grant for the elderly, although, as incomes fell and schools closed, the child-support grant on offer was to prove insufficient. In terms of sustaining the food system, some support was provided for small farmers but not for small-scale fishers. In relation to nutrition, there was quite strong community support in the form of food kitchens and food parcels although the quality of the food provided in this way was mixed.

4. Discussion and concluding remarks

Although data from official and academic studies can indicate broad changes in the food systems, such as for example, in relation to reduced incomes and price increases, the food diaries which are a key research tool in the present project should be leveraged more effectively to source more qualitative information on social reproduction issues, including the question of gender divisions in households. The focus of the food diaries should thus be adjusted accordingly.

Impacts of the reproductive squeeze
In Ghana, young women were saddled with much of the additional social reproduction work and were left to fend themselves in terms of accessing an education under Covid-19, as they had been during earlier times of hardship, for example, when the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) were imposed.

In South Africa, the reproductive squeeze generally did not lead to a renegotiation between women and men, but a dispersal of domestic responsibilities among women of different generations.

In Tanzania, women food processors and farmers reported that the school closures had provided young women with an opportunity to learn entrepreneurship and domestic activities, for example, by preparing home gardens and gaining a greater understanding of how their parents were making money.

Shifts in the political economy of food systems
In South Africa, school feeding programmes are generally managed on the ground by local unemployed mothers of pupils, who receive a small allowance in return. Under Covid-19 restrictions, the hours of these underpaid food handlers were extended, as the pupils were forced to attend school in shifts, leading to complaints about their already poor conditions of employment. On the positive side, as pupils stopped going to school, the food that had been allocated for their lunches was distributed among local communities instead. Thus, a number of schools took on an additional function, providing food aid to poorer families.

Incomes and food supplies decreased in many South African households under Covid-19, as jobs and trade opportunities were lost and food prices rose. National data on this trend could usefully be supplemented by qualitative data from field research on the increasing importance of the role of street traders, who provide food at half the price of supermarkets, in helping poorer families address domestic shortfalls. The field research could also explore the impacts of reduced buying on informal traders, who lost significant business as a result of economic setbacks and job losses under Covid-19.

The research may also identify some of the advantages of informality, such as the relative flexibility of self-employed farmers and traders which enabled them to perform social reproductive functions. For example, some women in the informal sector were able to take their children to work, or leave early to attend to domestic work at home.

Impacts on small-scale fishing communities

In South Africa, as export markets and restaurants were closed, the market for fish collapsed. However, many people in local fishing communities soon came to depend on food aid, with the majority of their catch going elsewhere – for example, to large firms which bought the fish cheaply so that they could freeze it and sell it at a handsome profit later, once prices rose again.

Men have increasingly taken over the productive roles of cleaning and selling fish which used to be occupied by women, who have apparently been largely relegated to social reproduction work. This trend appears to have been reinforced under Covid-19.

The role of women in fishing communities as domestic workers for the bourgeoisie or as cleaners in the tourism sector also fell away as these employment opportunities contracted under lockdown, with potentially significant implications for the role played by these women in the productive sector more broadly.