

28 October 2020



# Rapid information *from* household high-frequency survey

Summary of Results from Round 3  
30 JULY - 20 AUGUST 2020



## Key Messages

*This brief presents the main findings from the third of eight rounds of a nationally representative survey of 1,500 randomly selected households in all states/regions of Myanmar. The survey was undertaken by conducting a 20-minute phone call with respondents between 30 July and 20 August 2020.*

1



Employment had picked up but had not yet reached the level of March 2020: 15 percent of households' main workers were still out of employment in August. This result was similar across all consumption quintiles.

2



Recovery appeared to be faster for better-off households than poorer ones. While labor and non-labor incomes remained lower than before March 2020, businesses owned by poorer households were harder hit and more households in the bottom quintiles reported having received lower or no remittances.

3



Food insecurity remained as much a concern in August as it was in June. Government assistance benefitted wealthier households more, especially through the free electricity program. Food and cash assistance reached 17 percent of the poorest households.

**T**he Myanmar COVID-19 Monitoring Platform revealed that the strictly enforced containment measures in April and early May had large impacts on employment: in May, more than half of households' main workers had involuntarily ceased working and more than half of those still working earned lower incomes than in March. The progressive easing of these measures in late May translated into more households' main workers returning

to work in June and fewer of them earning less than in March. Government support also increased, with assistance reaching more households in June than before.

**By the time of the survey, Myanmar registered 360 COVID-19 cases and 6 deaths.** By then, most lockdown measures had been lifted across the country although international commercial flights were not allowed to resume. The Myanmar Central Statistical Organization (CSO) and the World Bank partnered for a third survey

round in August 2020, to update earlier findings which were indicative of an early recovery. The third survey round reached about three out of four of the June respondents, along with new respondents. The August survey round enabled the continued monitoring of employment trends, food security, and coping mechanisms as containment measures were relaxed, leading to improvements of household conditions just before Myanmar was subjected to a more serious outbreak and new containment measures starting on 16 August.



The recovery that started in June continued in August for households in all consumption quintiles<sup>1</sup> and across all sectors of activities. Across all consumption quintiles, fewer households' main workers (15 percent) were not working in August 2020, compared to May (54 percent) and June (35 percent). Households' main workers engaged in secondary activities (manufacturing, construction) and in tourism and transportation were more likely to be unemployed in August than those engaged in other sectors. At the same time, when looking at households surveyed in June and August (panel households), one out of five households' main workers who were not working between March and July were working in August; nearly three out of ten of these main workers were engaged in agriculture which could potentially capture the increased demand for labor in rice weeding and the harvest of pumpkin and cucumber.<sup>2</sup>

Despite an uplift in employment, some households continued to earn lower incomes. More than a third of households' main workers reported lower incomes in August 2020 than before.<sup>3</sup> Households' main workers (44 percent) engaged in "retail and personal services" were more likely to report lower incomes than households' main workers in other sectors. The retail sector appears the least able to bounce back rapidly from the shock, likely due to changed consumer behaviors and reduced demand. While the incidence of lower labor incomes among main workers were similar across quintiles, the least well-off households were more likely than richer ones to lose remittances. Lower remittances could likely be a result of international migration not having resumed, and domestic migrants suffering.

More businesses of households in bottom consumption quintiles reported reduced earnings in August, compared to the national average. In August, over half of households' businesses reported lower earnings, with the figure reaching 65 percent of households in the bottom consumption quintile. Gaps in earnings between

bottom and top consumption quintiles could be widening as a result of the crisis. Looking at panel households, more than 90 percent of those with businesses that lost earnings in June 2020 are not faring better in August, reporting the same level of earnings (37 percent of businesses) or even reduced earnings (52 percent of businesses). Businesses in the retail and personal services sector again seem to struggle most, with 55 percent of businesses that reported earning less between March and June having lower or no earnings in August.

Farming activities have picked up in August relative to May, as movement restrictions were lifted. About 44 percent of households were engaged in work in the agriculture sector before March 2020. In August, ten percent of these households were unable to farm compared to 45 percent in May; most households reported not being able to acquire and transport inputs as the main reason. Half of the farming households sold their agricultural products through direct sales in the market in March. About 30 percent of those able to work in their farm have lost one marketing channel in August and only 4 percent of them have managed to gain a new sale marketing channel.

In August, food security remained a concern, as households continued reducing their food consumption to cope with income losses and struggled to secure an adequate diet. Encouragingly, the share of households with at least one adult member who ate less than usual in the last 30 days declined from 13 percent in June to seven percent in August. However, in August more households reported having at least one adult who went hungry and did not eat (eight percent compared to five percent in June), or having at least one adult who went hungry for a whole day (six percent compared to two percent in June). In August, about 11 percent of households experienced moderate to severe food insecurity measured using the food insecurity experience scale (FIES).<sup>4</sup> About 21 percent of households in the lower consumption

quintiles experienced food insecurity in at least one out of the eight dimensions used to determine the food insecurity experience scale. Over half of panel households who reported at least one problem related to food security in June had at least one problem in August. Food assistance<sup>5</sup> was received by 21 percent of households who had experienced any food security issue in June 2020.

Government assistance provided support to households but came short of adequately mitigating impacts on the poorest households. The survey undertaken in August captured three kinds of Government support to households: food assistance (received by 16 percent of households), cash assistance<sup>6</sup> (18 percent of households) and an electricity subsidy for the first 150 units consumed in each month, equivalent to about MMK 11,500 (31 percent of households).<sup>7</sup> While more households with an unemployed main worker (24 percent) had received food assistance compared to households with an employed main worker (15 percent), this was not true for cash assistance and electricity subsidy. It appeared that the Government support was not pro-poor; the same share of households across quintiles received food or cash assistance. A larger share of households in the bottom quintile was coping by reducing food consumption, using savings, or borrowing from family and friends. The adoption of these coping mechanisms risks affecting investments in nutrition, education and other areas with implications for human capital development in the long run.

Knowledge of measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 was high in August, but the adoption of some key measures could be improved. About 95 percent of households were familiar with measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. More than 80 percent of households reported using mask and/or gloves or handwashing. However, only 40 percent of households reported avoiding interactions and 11 percent reported maintaining distance with others when talking.

1 Welfare quintiles are measured using a consumption aggregate predicted using multiple imputations and stepwise regressions and dividing the whole consumption distribution with imputations into five continuous intervals.  
 2 LIFT. 2019. Farming systems analysis in Myanmar: Methodological background, selected case studies and synthesis of field-based studies across 5 states and regions of Myanmar  
 3 Unless specified otherwise, for households inter-

viewed in June and August (panel households), the period of reference for comparison is June; for households who started the survey in June (replacement households), the period of reference for comparison is March. This enables better capturing of economic changes related to COVID-19.  
 4 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2020.  
 5 Note that the survey design did not distinguish the different food assistance programs that were imple-

mented by the Government of Myanmar.  
 6 Note that the survey design did not distinguish the different cash assistance programs implemented by the Government of Myanmar but to our knowledge cash assistance ranges from MMK 15,000 to 20,000.  
 7 The free electricity subsidy program being universal, the results from the survey could be under-reported in the highest quintile since in 2017 68 percent of households in this quintile had access to electricity from public grid.

