



WAVE 4

National Income Dynamics
Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus
Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAM)

Hunger in South Africa: Results from Wave 4 of NIDS-CRAM

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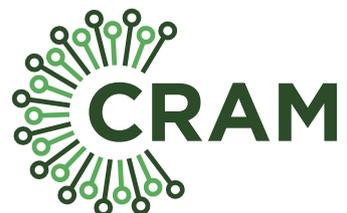
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12 May 2021



N.i.D.S.
NATIONAL INCOME DYNAMICS STUDY



CORONAVIRUS RAPID MOBILE SURVEY 2020

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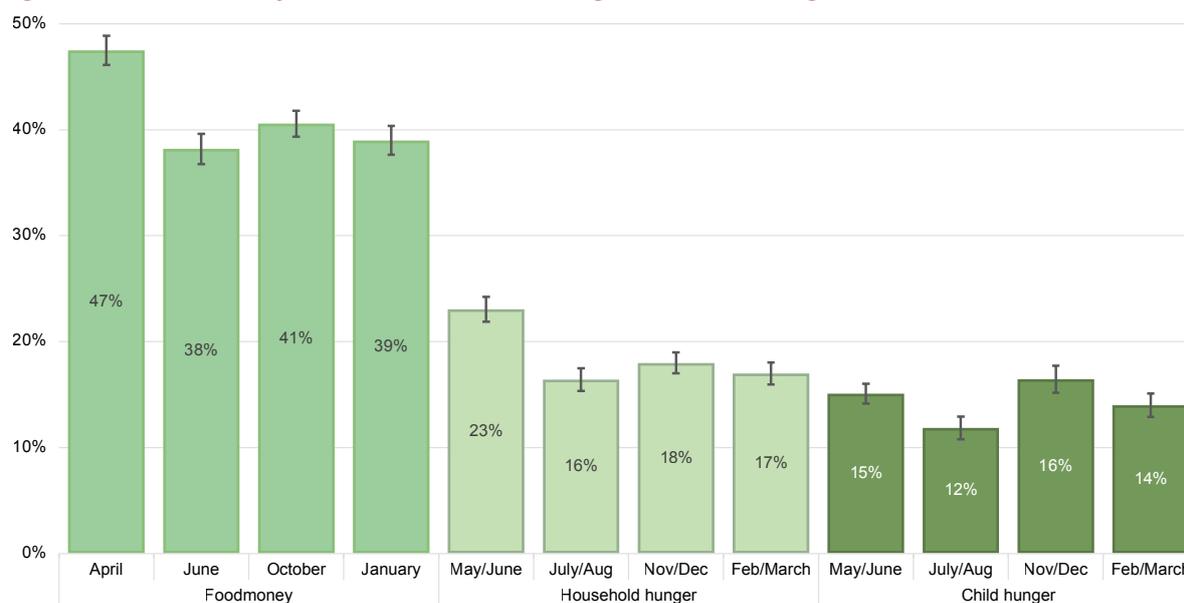
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Executive Summary

Wave 4 of the National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile (NIDS-CRAM) survey provides an update to the widely reported and sobering findings from the first three waves of the study. Indicators of hunger and a lack of money to buy food, or what we will refer to as ‘food insecurity’ for brevity, have remained stubbornly high, and do not appear to have changed substantially since June 2020. We conclude that given the protracted nature of the pandemic, slow recovery, and its continuing social and economic impact, the government needs to place hunger and food security at the center of its Covid-19 response.

The first wave of the NIDS-CRAM survey, collected in May and June 2020, provided strong evidence of drastic increases in household and child hunger during the initial period of the coronavirus pandemic. The second wave of NIDS-CRAM showed improvement in all three measures, although hunger and food insecurity remained disturbingly high. In Wave 3, surveyed in November and December 2020, some of the improvements noted in Wave 2 had reversed, despite further relaxing of the lockdown restrictions. The latest wave, which was surveyed between February and March 2021, shows small but largely statistically insignificant improvements in these measures since the previous wave. Overall, the results indicate that the situation is similar to July/August 2020, at the time of the second wave of data collection. This means that hunger and food insecurity is a little better than in the first wave, though the decline in child hunger was not significant.

Figure 1: Lack of money for food, household hunger and child hunger, Waves 1 to 4



Source: Authors' calculations from NIDS-CRAM data. The different dates are because the question on food money referred to the month before the survey fieldwork took place, while the questions on hunger refer to the previous week during the fieldwork period.

Overall, the proportion of households who reported running out of money for food went from 47% in Wave 1 to 38% in Wave 2, and then it increased again to 41% in Wave 3 and decreased to 39% in Wave 4. There is a similar pattern at play in household hunger between Waves 1 to 4: a significant decline from 23% to 16% between Waves 1 and 2, an increase to 18% in Wave 3, and a decline to 17% in Wave 4.

In terms of child hunger, the proportion of respondents with children in their household who reported a child going hungry at least once in the past week saw a significant decline from 15% to 12% between Waves 1 and 2, before it rose to 16% in Wave 3 – a statistically significant increase and at

the time an alarming discovery. In Wave 4, this measure declined significantly, to 14% indicating that 1 in 7 respondents reported child hunger in February/March 2021. While this statistically significant decline is encouraging, child hunger is still higher than it was in June 2020.

The picture which emerges from these statistics indicates that household food insecurity and hunger decreased significantly in June 2020, but have changed little from this new level for the remainder of the study period (i.e., from May 2020 to March 2021). That is, food insecurity and hunger have remained relatively stable, suggesting a permanently higher equilibrium level of food insecurity in South Africa due to the coronavirus pandemic, the lockdown measures which were instituted, and the accompanying economic contraction. These levels remain high despite the government interventions that attempted to soften the impact of the pandemic and lockdowns on poverty and on nutritional insecurity.

Initially, the government support measures which were implemented to combat the effects of the pandemic were planned to end in October 2020, but the severe conditions on the ground led to the extension of the Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant first to the end of January 2021 and subsequently to the end of April 2021. The top-up of all the other social grants was ended in October, when grant values reverted to their pre-Covid19 levels. Together, the reach of the social grant system is now exceedingly large: More than two out of every three respondents in all four waves of the NIDS-CRAM survey indicated that someone in their households benefited from at least one grant. The reduction in grant values for the Child Support Grant (CSG) and old-age pension (OAP), i.e. elimination of the top-up, reduced the safety net for a large proportion of the poor.

Overview

The first wave of the National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM), collected in May and June 2020, provided strong evidence of drastic increases in household and child hunger, as well as food insecurity, during the initial period of the Coronavirus pandemic. Much of the improvement since 2000 in household and child hunger had been almost entirely reversed by the hard lockdown and the coronavirus pandemic (Van der Berg, Zuze and Bridgman, 2020). The second wave of NIDS-CRAM, in July and August 2020, showed improvement in all three measures, although hunger and food insecurity remained disturbingly high.

In Wave 3, surveyed in November and December 2020, and in Wave 4, surveyed in February and March 2021, it appears that household food insecurity and hunger have stabilised at levels around those seen in Wave 2. This implies that there is a permanently higher equilibrium level of hunger in South Africa due to the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown measures which were instituted. While the results from Wave 4 indicate a marginal improvement in these statistics, it is too early to confirm whether this trend will continue into the remainder of 2021.

Wave 4 of the NIDS-CRAM survey provides an update to the widely reported and sobering findings from the first waves of the study. Indicators of hunger and a lack of money to buy food, or what we will refer to as ‘food insecurity’ for brevity, have remained stubbornly high, and do not appear to have changed substantially since June 2020. We conclude that given the protracted nature of the pandemic, slow recovery and its continuing social and economic impact, the government needs to place hunger and food security at the center of the Covid-19 response.

BOX A: NIDS-CRAM Wave 4

This report draws on the fourth wave of the NIDS-CRAM survey. The first wave of this data was collected between 7 May and 27 June 2020 (during stages 3 and 4 of the national lockdown) and the second wave between 13 July and 13 August 2020 (during ‘advanced’ stage 3 of the lockdown). The third wave was undertaken between 2 November and 13 December 2020. As there had been attrition in Waves 2 and 3, there was also a refresher sample of 1 084 new individuals added to Wave 3, to keep the achieved sample broadly representative of the national population. The fourth wave, on which this report is based, was undertaken between 2 February and 10 March 2021, and includes 5 629 successful interviews.

How has the overall situation changed across waves?

All four waves of the NIDS-CRAM survey asked multiple questions about child and household hunger, as well as a question regarding household food insecurity (having enough money to buy food), as shown in Box B.

BOX B: Questions on food insecurity in Wave 4 of NIDS-CRAM

In the month of January did your household run out of money to buy food?

In the last 7 days, has anyone in your household gone hungry because there wasn’t enough food?

How often did they go hungry?

(Options: Never; 1 or 2 days; 3 or 4 days; almost every day; every day)

In the past 7 days, has any child in your household gone hungry because there wasn’t enough food?

How often did they go hungry?

(Options: Never; 1 or 2 days; 3 or 4 days; almost every day; every day)

Note: the lack of money to buy food refers to January, and the questions on hunger to the last week before the interview, which was conducted in either February or March 2021.

Since the same questions were asked in all four waves, it is possible to shed light on how reported hunger and food security have changed between May/June 2020 and February/March 2021. Overall, the proportion of households that reported running out of money for food went from 47% in Wave 1 to 38% in Wave 2 – a significant decrease. The proportion of households reporting food insecurity stood at 41% in Wave 3 and 39% in Wave 4. The level of food insecurity is once again what it was in June 2020.

There is a similar pattern at play in household hunger between Waves 1 to 4: a significant decline from 23% to 16% between Waves 1 and 2, and insignificant changes in this measure to 16%, 18% and 17% between Waves 2, 3 and 4. While the measures of food insecurity and household hunger have changed across waves, these levels reported in Wave 4 are statistically insignificantly different from those in Wave 2, except for child hunger, where there has been a small but significant rise.

In terms of child hunger, the proportion of respondents with children who reported a child going hungry at least once in the past week saw a significant decline from 15% to 12% between Waves 1 and 2. However, this statistic rose again to 16% in Wave 3 – a statistically significant increase and an alarming discovery. In Wave 4, this measure declined to 14%, indicating that 1 in 7 households reported child hunger in February/March 2021. The decline in child hunger is an encouraging finding and is a statistically significant decline. Even so, the levels of households reporting child hunger have not changed substantially since July/August 2020. It will be crucial to report on this statistic from the fifth and final wave of NIDS-CRAM in the coming months to determine whether this downward trend in child hunger continues into the rest of 2021.

The continuing reality for many households in South Africa is perhaps not quite as dire in comparison to the period during the hard lockdown, but it remains a bleak picture. The changes between Waves 3 and 4 do indicate an improving trend in households' circumstances, but it is too early to conclude if there will be more of a recovery to pre-2020 levels of household food insecurity and hunger. That is, these results intimate that there is a new and higher equilibrium level of hunger and food insecurity in South Africa because of the coronavirus pandemic.

As Box B shows, if survey respondents indicated that someone in their household had gone hungry because there was not enough food, they were then asked to indicate how often they had gone hungry or skipped a meal in the past 7 days. For those households reporting hunger, the severity of hunger can be measured by answers to these questions.

For child hunger, just below 30% of households who reported that a child had gone hungry, indicated that this had occurred every day or almost every day in the past week in both Waves 1 and 2. 24% of households reported this in Wave 3 and in Wave 4 as well. This indicates that while children are still going hungry, the severity of that hunger appears to have abated somewhat since Wave 2. For households where the respondent reported that someone in the household had gone hungry in the past week, around 30% reported that this had happened every day or almost every day in Waves 1, 2 and 3, while 24% of households reported this for Wave 4. Once again, it appears that the depth of overall household hunger has become less severe.

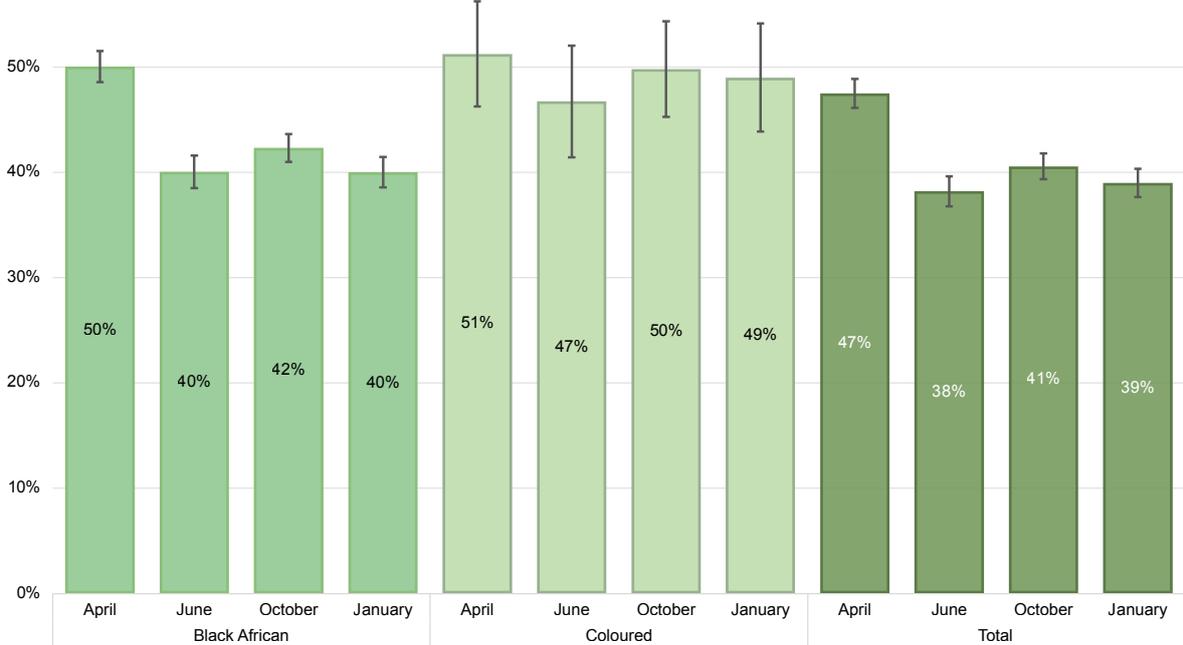
Regression analysis on changes between Waves 3 and 4 in access to money to buy food and the adequacy of food intake reveals that running out of money for food in previous NIDS-CRAM waves exhibits strong persistence. Households who have reported running out of money to buy food in previous waves are considerably more likely to do so again in Wave 4. Additionally, black African households are most likely to experience food insecurity.

When other factors that could explain changes in hunger and food insecurity were explored, it was found that receiving a CSG is once again significant in helping to reduce child hunger (for households with children). However, the change in government support due to the phasing out of the top-ups to the social grants could have contributed to grants no longer significantly reducing household hunger. It should be noted that it was not possible to observe the exact effect of grant support on the rate of hunger and food insecurity due to confounding factors. That is, households who receive a grant are also more likely to go hungry, but due to the targeting of CSG and SRD grants, a decline in

these sources of income would have affected households who are more vulnerable to experiencing hunger. Once again, there is evidence of adults shielding children from hunger in Wave 4. That is, reported hunger among households exceeded that for children.

Who experiences food insecurity?

Figure 2: Food insecurity in black African and coloured households, Waves 1 to 4



Note: The total bars also include Indians and whites. Due to small sample sizes and large confidence intervals, figures for these groups are not shown separately here.

Source: Authors' calculations from NIDS-CRAM Wave 4 data.

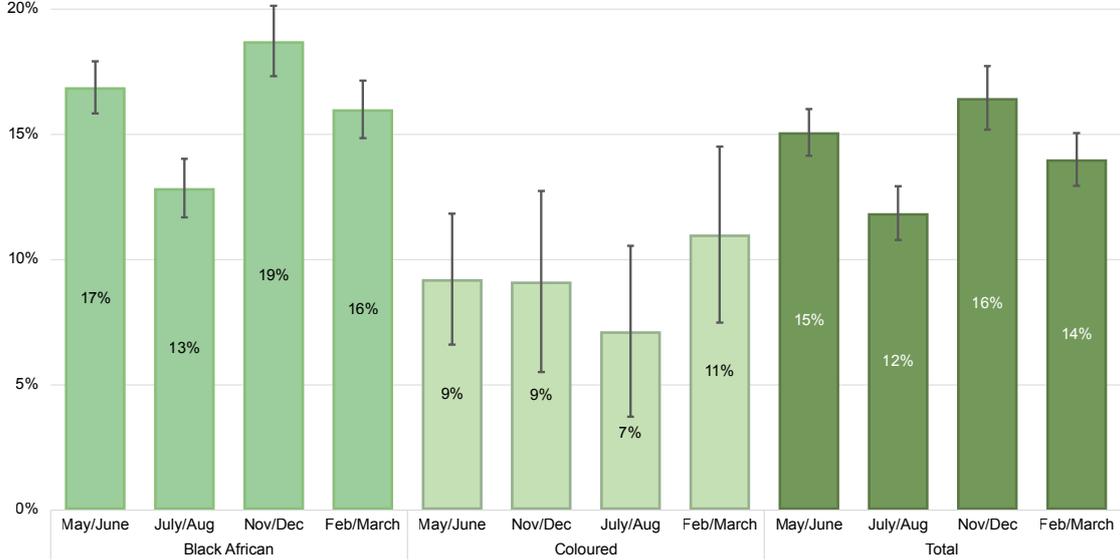
As shown above, the total number of respondents reporting that their household ran out of money for food in the month before the survey decreased between April and June 2020, rose marginally (not statistically significantly) between June and October 2020, and has stabilised at 39% in January 2021. For the two poorest race groups, black Africans and coloureds, a similar pattern applied. It was not possible to observe any significant patterns for Asian/Indian and white households over time because of their smaller number, and because far fewer households in these groups lack money for food. In Figure 2 above, the change in household food insecurity for coloured households between October 2020 and January 2021 is also not statistically significant.

As seen in Figures 3 and 4, when disaggregating household and child hunger by population group, the story is relatively consistent. Reported household hunger in the black African population group decreased from 26% in May/June to 19% in July/August before significantly rising again to 22% in November/December and then declining significantly to 19% in February/March. For coloured households, hunger has increased, albeit insignificantly, to 15% for February/March 2021. As mentioned above, the sample sizes for the Asian/Indian and the white population groups are quite small, making it difficult to observe any clear changes in these measures. However, household hunger is less prevalent for these groups.

The incidence of child hunger also initially decreased for black Africans, from 18% of respondents indicating that a child had gone hungry in the past 7 days in May/June to 13% in July/August, before rising again sharply to 18% in November/December. Encouragingly, the level of child hunger reported in black African households decreased to 16% in February and March 2021 (Figure 3). As with household hunger, it appears that child hunger in coloured households has increased in Wave 4. While the increase in Figure 3 is not statistically significant, it is relatively large and may

potentially indicate a worrying trend. Sample sizes are too small to identify an accurate measure of change among other population groups. The overall picture of child hunger indicates that while there was a decline in Wave 2, it has not substantially changed since then. Child hunger seems to have stabilised at a permanently higher level than before the pandemic.

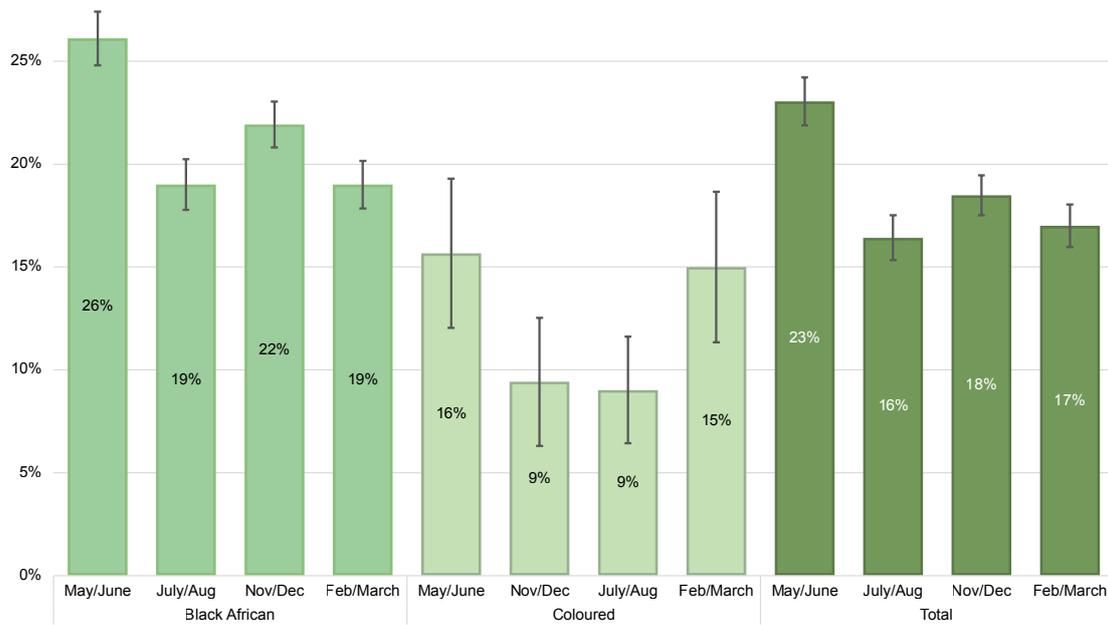
Figure 3: Child hunger in black African and coloured households, Waves 1 to 4



Note: The total figures also include Indians and whites. Due to small sample sizes and large confidence intervals, figures for these groups are not shown separately here.
Source: Authors' calculations from NIDS-CRAM Wave 4 data.

The decrease in child hunger between Waves 3 and 4 has been driven by the decrease in child hunger in the black African population group, but has been offset by the relatively large increase in child hunger in coloured households. Different individuals may have different standards in mind when responding to questions such as those regarding food security asked in the survey, yet the aggregate picture that emerges appears to be indicative of their real conditions.

Figure 4: Household hunger in black African and coloured households, Waves 1 to 4.



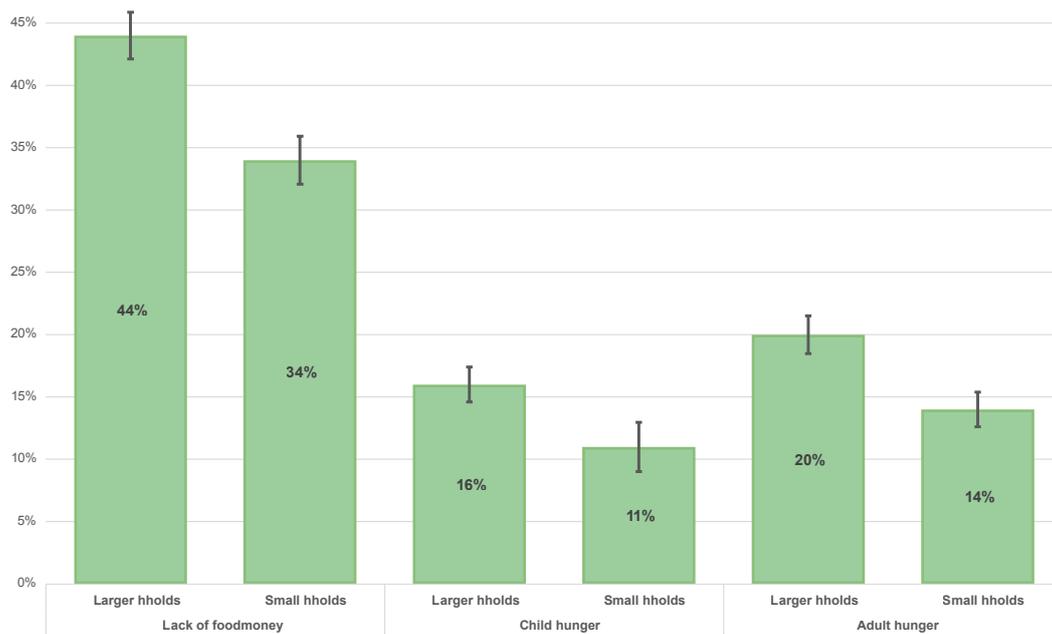
Note: The total figures also include Indians and whites. Due to small sample sizes and large confidence intervals, figures for these groups are not shown separately here.

Source: Authors' calculations from NIDS-CRAM Wave 4 data.

Further analysis by region-type shows that urban areas were better off in Wave 3 and have continued to be better off in Wave 4 in comparison with traditional and rural areas with respect to money for food and experiencing hunger in the household. The gap between urban and rural households has narrowed somewhat between Waves 3 and 4, however.

The relationship between household size and food security has strengthened between Waves 3 and 4. That is, smaller households are less likely to be associated with food insecurity, and the gap between smaller and larger households seems to have grown. Figure 5 shows that small households (with no more than four members) are much less likely to run out of money for food and are also significantly less likely to experience hunger.

Figure 5: Food insecurity and household size, Wave 4



Note: Small households are defined here as those with up to four members.

Source: Authors' calculations from NIDS-CRAM Wave 4 data.

What government support has been made available?

To mitigate the impact of the lockdown on employment, income and food poverty, the government introduced temporary emergency social support measures after the promulgation of the State of Emergency on 27 March 2020. These included (i) temporary 'top-ups' to existing social grants, (ii) establishment of a Covid-19 SRD grant, (iii) introduction of a Temporary Employee/Employer Relief Scheme (TERS), and (iv) localised social relief (Republic of South Africa, 2020; for discussion in the context of NIDS-CRAM, see Bridgman, Van der Berg & Patel 2020).

Initially, these measures were planned to end in October 2020, but the severe conditions on the ground led to the extension of the Covid-19 SRD grant first to the end of January 2021 and subsequently to the end of April 2021. The top-up of all the other social grants was ended in October, when grant values reverted to their pre-Covid19 levels.

Together, the reach of the social grant system is now exceedingly large: more than two out of every three respondents in all four waves of the NIDS-CRAM survey indicated that someone in their households benefited from at least one grant. The reduction in grant values for the CSG and OAP (elimination of the top-ups) reduced the strength of the safety net for a large proportion of the poor.

Localised relief takes the form of emergency food assistance by government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations, the private sector and philanthropic initiatives. In Wave 1, 18% of households received support for food and shelter from external sources, as against only 12% in Wave 3 and just over 10% in Wave 4 (some respondents received more than one type of support; the question was not asked in Wave 2). Government support reached 8% of households in Wave 1, but this halved to 4% in Wave 3 and stood at just over 5% in Wave 4. Support from NGOs, faith-based organisations and humanitarian associations (some of them government-funded) also declined from 6% to 4% between Waves 1 and 3 and further declined to 3% in Wave 4. Finally, support from family, neighbours, and members of the community also declined between Waves 1 and 3, but somewhat less, from 9% to 7%. This type of support was experienced by 6% of households in Wave 4. Interestingly, a much larger share of support from the community reaches

households that have too little money for food or experience child hunger, with NGOs and especially the government less able to target its support towards those most in need.

Non-governmental and informal giving were significant channels of social provision during the early stages of the pandemic, with substantial reach (Wills, Patel, Van der Berg and Mpeta, 2020). Questions about the nature and scope of external support received were not asked in Wave 2. In total, 800 968 food parcels were distributed between May and July 2020 by the Department of Social Development. Three-quarters of the food parcels were distributed in May and June with sharply declining provision in July 2020. In October, as the social grant top-ups came to an end, the Minister of Finance, Minister Tito Mboweni announced additional measures to mitigate food insecurity and poverty (South Africa, October 2020). This included first, an additional allocation of R6.8 billion to the Department of Social Development to extend the special Covid-19 social relief of distress grant until 31 January 2021. Second, an additional R1 billion was allocated for food relief to vulnerable households. In total, short-term social grant relief amounted to R48 billion in 2021. Between May and January 2021, approximately R200 billion had been spent by government on social grants and social relief reaching 24.6 million beneficiaries making up 41% of the population (Personal Communication: DSD, SASSA and NDA, 31 January 2021). Half of the funds appropriated by parliament in October 2020 was used to fund the extension of the SRD grant until the end of the financial year, with the remaining allocation funding food relief programmes by provincial Departments of Social Development. No reports are available yet on how these funds were disbursed. The Solidarity Fund disbursed R100 million for once-off food vouchers (R700) to 135 000 beneficiaries and a further R100 million for farming input vouchers to 47 000 subsistence farmers (Personal Communication with Wendy Tlou from the Solidarity Fund, 7 April 2021).

The government's food relief programme has been mired in allegations of corruption, irregular payments and capture by public service officials, as documented in the preliminary report of the Auditor General (See Auditor General, 2020). Subsequent reports by the Auditor General point to poor monitoring of food parcel distribution during the pandemic, inefficient distribution systems and a lack of consultation with SASSA on efficient provisioning processes that could maximise the impact of food relief. The Auditor General also reported that Government spent R177 million on damaged and poorly packaged food parcels (Felix, 2020). Similar challenges of fraud and corruption have been encountered in payment of the TERS, also documented in the Auditor General's report. This resulted in the stalling of TERS payments, with negative impacts on access to much-needed material assistance by those who qualified. Other systemic challenges of an administrative and technological nature also hampered the efficient rollout of the COVID-19 SRD grant at scale. However, the SRD grant has had significant uptake since then and by the end of January 2021, it reached on average 6.1 million beneficiaries. Between May 2020 and January 2021, government had spent R17.2 billion (Personal Communication: DSD, SASSA and NDA, 2021).

Data on the reach of social grants are broadly consistent with administrative information. Without more detailed information on household income, it is difficult to evaluate targeting accuracy. In Figure 6, we assess whether respondents reported that their households ran out of money for food in January as a proxy for poverty. As indicated, 39% of households ran out of money for food in January. Only if far more than 39% of grants or social support go to households reporting that they ran out of food money can we unequivocally state that this programme is well-targeted to the neediest households. We admit that there is a problem in this measure of targeting: There may be some reverse causality (endogeneity), where some households do not lack money for food precisely *because* of the grants or other support they receive. Even so, this is helpful in examining the targeting of support for poor households, but we caution that this reverse causality should be remembered in interpreting this targeting measure.

While TERS, which goes to people who have been temporarily laid off, was the least targeted grant in Wave 3 on this proxy measure of targeting, this has changed. Formerly employed persons are often not in the poorest households, and the relatively large value of the TERS (ranging between R3 500 and R6 838) may have raised some households' income to a level where they no longer lack money for food. Households receiving TERS may not have run out of money for food precisely

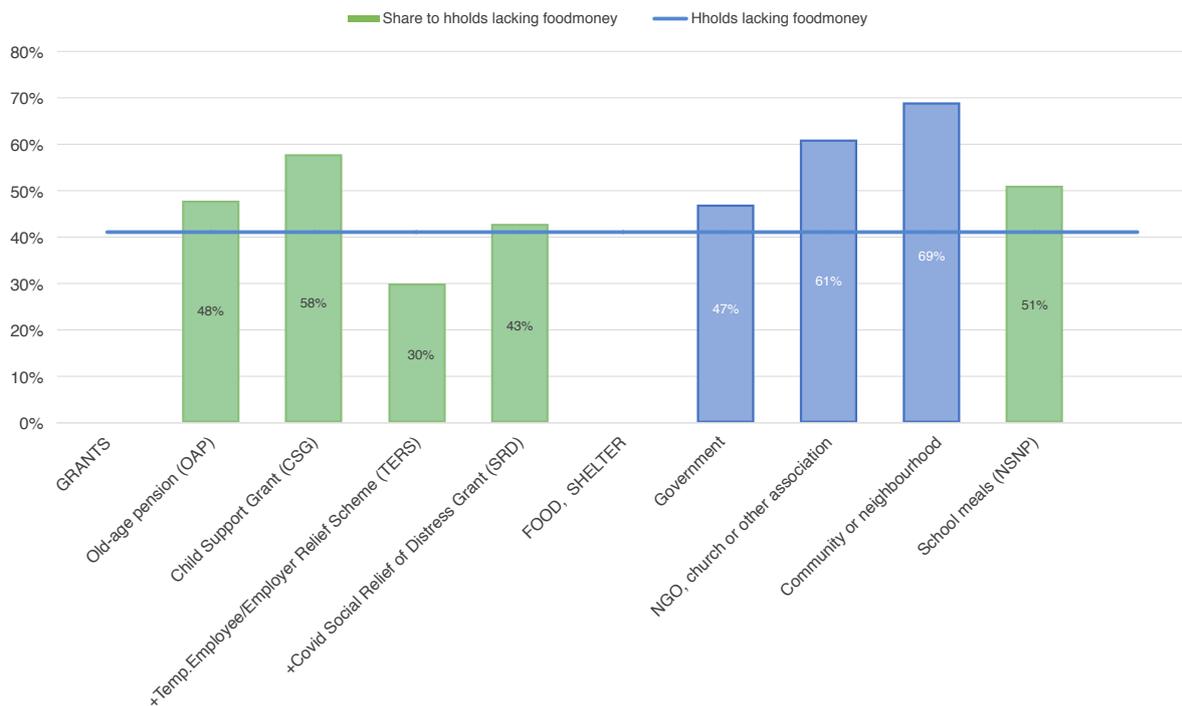
because they received this grant. Yet nevertheless, 59% of households receiving this grant had also run out of money for food.

Altogether 47% of households who receive at least one CSG reported running out of money for food in January. This indicates that the CSG reaches quite many poorer households who nevertheless still experience food insecurity, but it is surprising that more than half of the respondents in households with CSG recipients indicated that their household did not experience a lack of food money in January. The figure shows that respondents in households receiving at least one OAP or SRD grant were not much more likely to have reported that the household ran out of money for food in January. But reverse causality is almost certainly an issue here: the larger OAP and even (though this likely due to its smaller size) the SRD may raise some household incomes enough to prevent them from running out of money for food.

The share of support for food and shelter that goes to households who have run out of food money is in all cases more than 39% (their share of all households), indicating fairly accurate targeting. Of the households receiving food or shelter from the government, 52% reported that they lacked money for food in January, surprisingly even somewhat better targeting than the 47% proportion that applies to those receiving support from NGOs (indicating considerably less accurate targeting than in Wave 3). Best targeted was support from the community and neighbours, with 70% of recipients having run out of money for food.

Before the pandemic, the National Schools Nutrition Programme (NSNP) played an important role in providing relief of child hunger. The research generated by NIDS-CRAM Wave 1 accentuated the need to restart this programme even while schools remained closed. In Wave 2, about 21% of respondents indicated that children in their households were again receiving school meals during July/August, and this proportion more than doubled to 45% in November/December. In Wave 4 only 43% of respondents indicated that children in their household were getting meals at school, probably due to the delayed start to the school year. The targeting measure presented in the figure does not indicate particularly good targeting, with only 47% of those receiving school meals being in a household that reportedly ran out of money for food in January 2021. These school meals are investigated in further detail in the report on education (Mohohlwane, Kotzé, Taylor & Shepherd, 2021).

Figure 6: Targeting of grants and support: The share of grants or support going to households that have run out of money for food in Wave 4



Source: Authors' calculations from NIDS-CRAM Wave 4 data.

How has government support affected household food security?

In the first wave of NIDS-CRAM, job loss during the lockdown was found to be a major contributor towards households running out of money to buy food. The government recognised this crisis in household food security and added top-ups to existing grants and also created two new instruments to provide relief, namely TERS and the SRD grant.

The reduction in hunger between the two waves, in April/June and July/August, may have been due to someone getting or returning to a job, or the expansion of social protection through the two new grants (TERS and the SRD) (Bhorat, Oosthuizen & Stanwix, 2020). Additionally, the NSNP, which had stopped during the hard lockdown, also recommenced in July, although it was only operational for part of the Wave 2 study period. Finally, public and private food assistance may have had a localised effect of reducing hunger. Existing grants such as the CSG, with their top-ups, would not have expanded since Wave 1, so they are less likely to have been associated with reduced hunger.

An increase in income from employment or business between Waves 1 and 2 did raise some households above the level of food insecurity, but this did not continue between Waves 2 and 3. Whereas the expansion of TERS was a factor in the reduction in food insecurity in Wave 2, in Wave 3, the only social grant change that played a role was the phasing out of top-ups to the CSG and OAP and related grants, which was probably a factor in the increased food insecurity in November and December. This level of food insecurity has then continued into March 2021.

Government policies to ameliorate the effects of low incomes and the economic consequences of the pandemic are quite well targeted to many of those who are food insecure. Thus, households that report child hunger in Wave 4 are quite likely to benefit from grants or support: 33% of such households receive the OAP, 85% the CSG, 18% TERS, and 20% the SRD. Both government support and community support are significantly higher for such households than for households unaffected

by child hunger. The continuation of child hunger during the pandemic thus appears less the result of poor targeting of vulnerable households than the fact that such support is insufficient for many households, given their size and composition and poor access to other income sources. The reduction in grant top-ups after the beginning of October has already weakened the safety net for such households. Phasing out of the SRD at the end of April 2021 will further weaken this safety net, affecting both the 17% of food insecure households with children that receive this grant, as well as the 17% of all households that currently receive the SRD. Escaping poverty will become more difficult for the first group, and more of the latter group may plunge into food insecurity.

Conclusion: Policy to protect households from hunger

Earlier research papers based on Wave 1 suggested that the social grant system offered important protection from the worst economic effects of the lockdown and pandemic. The top-ups to the CSG and the OAP improved the financial situation of households with no other income sources. The results from Waves 3 and 4, however, point to the fact that hunger and food insecurity in South Africa have settled at a permanently higher equilibrium level in comparison to pre-2020 levels. Whereas TERS and the SRD grant had not been fully operational during Wave 1, Wave 2 results showed that TERS had lifted many out of food insecurity. The CSG and SRD have been valuable, as have been the grant top-ups. Although the smaller grants, even with top-ups, were inadequate to keep households above the food poverty line, they do ameliorate poverty.

After Wave 2, we stated that the evidence indicates that it would be disastrous to prematurely end the top-ups to the grants and terminate the SRD. The phasing out of the top-ups may well have contributed to rising food insecurity between Waves 2 and 3, while the termination of the SRD at the end of April 2021 will add to food insecurity. Additionally, the results from Wave 4 indicate that continued labour market fragility will place more people under great financial and likely nutritional stress, especially in larger households. Also rising food and electricity prices, and increases in fuel tariffs are likely to weigh heavily on households that are already struggling to meet food and other basic consumption expenditure. The hunger levels that we are already observing are only the tip of the iceberg: they hide the malnutrition that is less easily observable but that will continue to leave many South African children stunted. It is therefore highly desirable that poverty relief should continue to enjoy great priority in fiscal and policy choices, despite the undoubtedly difficult fiscal trade-offs that need to be made. Despite the value of such relief efforts, however, a strong and growing economy provides the best long-term safety net. Until the economy recovers, it remains important to reduce the effects of the pandemic and lockdown on food insecurity, especially as this could have lasting detrimental effects on the economic prospects of children.

Finally, policymakers need to place hunger and food security at the centre of its social development strategies. Failure to do so will deepen food poverty and inequality gaps and will further compromise the country's human development situation and economic recovery. The findings provide some pointers for policymakers to consider: First, poverty relief measures should continue to be a priority in fiscal policy decisions despite fiscal constraints. Second, ongoing monitoring of household food security and household and child hunger are needed as these are important proxy indicators to track progress and assess the effectiveness of government and non-governmental responses to the crisis. Third, the adjustment to the grant values following the phasing out of the top-ups coupled with the ending of the SRD at the end of April 2021, and the rising cost of living, are likely to impact negatively on household food security and household and child hunger. Additional measures are needed to strengthen the safety net through the mobilisation of government resources, but also non-governmental sources, including corporate social investment and private philanthropy. There is much to learn from the targeting of informal relief by community and neighbourhood systems of support which have proven to be consistently effective. Fourth, households most vulnerable to food insecurity and hunger need to be prioritised with supplementary interventions tailored to their needs, such as larger households with more than 4 people and households in traditional and rural areas. Fifth, special measures are needed to address child hunger and stunting, especially among black African children and increasingly, among coloured children who are more likely to experience

severe hunger. This is largely due to the low monetary level of the CSG. While the NSNP is also well-targeted, uptake levels are not what they were prior to the pandemic due to rotational timetabling and the late start to the school year. This points to the importance of getting the NSNP back to full scale, and of children returning to school with no rotational schedule, especially in a context of low infection rates in the country. These are important factors that need to be considered by policymakers and programme implementers in the current socio-economic context.

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