



Malawi, like other southern African countries, has endured several waves of infection since the COVID-19 pandemic started. The disease has had severe effects on the economy, including the agriculture sector. CGIAR and partners have been working in the country to determine the economic impacts, improve seed systems, and implement climate-smart technologies on farms.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

Agricultural production in Malawi, which was already challenged by factors including drought, flooding, and pest invasion such as the fall armyworm, now faces additional challenges due to the pandemic. These include disruptions to agricultural input (fertilizer, seed, labor) and output supply chains. The pandemic has also led to higher transport costs, market price changes, and reduced incomes for farmers.

Agrifood system (AFS) gross domestic product (GDP) declined due to income losses and supply chain disruptions, even though food supplies were exempt from lockdown restrictions.

With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, [cumulative GDP gains are projected by the third quarter of 2021](#) under a fast recovery scenario. They exceed their pre-COVID-19 levels by 217 billion Malawian kwacha (about US\$271 million) before the end of 2021. However, under a slow recovery scenario, Malawi's GDP declines until the end of 2020 before recovering during quarters two to four of 2021. Analysis shows that COVID-19 has the most significant impact on Malawi's urban informal sector, manufacturing, hotels and restaurants, the wider agrifood system, and exports.

Malawians in the wealthiest income quintiles and those living in urban areas have experienced higher income declines due to social distancing measures. It is estimated that 36.2% of the national GDP losses came from AFS.

CGIAR COVID-19 HUB RESEARCH RESPONSE

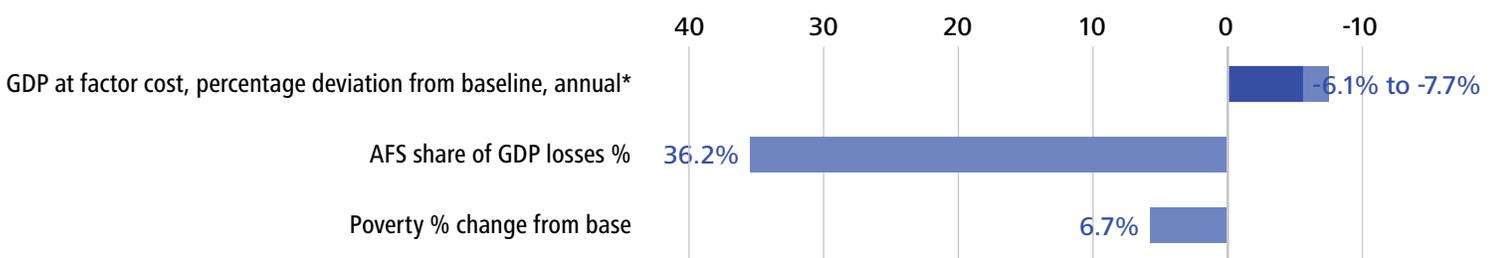
The CGIAR response in Malawi focuses on three main workstreams: updating the economic models used for assessing COVID-19 impacts; conducting studies on seed system improvement and the related implications for food security and diets; and establishing demonstration plots that use climate-resilient technologies.

Economic modeling results were published in a [report](#), and a training program based on those results was conducted for 20 government representatives. Demonstration of climate-smart technologies is expected to be conducted in August 2021. Dissemination and scaling-up of improved seeds of high-yield and nutritious crop varieties will happen through public-private partnerships; working through farmer field schools, lead farmers, and digital extension approaches – focusing on those most affected by COVID-19 – will facilitate adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices by farmers.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

The COVID-19 Hub has provided an opportunity for the CGIAR country team to work in a more coordinated fashion to deliver results. This has also led to closer interaction with government partners and increased interest from nongovernmental organizations and other local development partners in Malawi.

Figure 1: Economic and poverty effects of COVID-19 in Malawi 2020/2021



The change from in-person to virtual meetings during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic stalled research and collaboration with local stakeholders, as they either lacked fast Internet connections or the technical know-how to use Internet tools. Most meetings and events have returned to in-person settings, with COVID-19 protocols maintained.

Certain value chain activities, such as seed inspections, require physical visits. The inability to conduct these activities in 2020 during COVID-19 restrictions has led to a shortage of certified seeds.

CGIAR COVID-19-RELEVANT WORK IN MALAWI

Supporting families to grow biofortified crops

As a crisis response, the [Integrated Food Systems Approach to Build Nutrition Security](#) project was implemented with local partners

in Malawi and five other low-income countries. This 18-month, rapid-action initiative enables vulnerable families to grow nutrient-rich biofortified varieties of familiar staple crops, which are also high-yielding and cost farming families the same to grow as nonbiofortified local varieties.

Assessing the impact of the pandemic on value chains

Several studies were launched to analyze [the impacts of COVID-19 on value chains](#) using a common set of questionnaires to facilitate cross-country comparisons. In Malawi, the study is ongoing and focuses on various crops.



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The CGIAR COVID-19 Hub is led by the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health. To learn more, visit www.a4nh.cgiar.org/covidhub/

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