



Letter to Editor

Food Security in Sri Lanka During COVID19 Pandemic

Ramya Ekanayake¹*, Damayanthi Dassanayake²

¹ Department of Paediatrics, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

² Department of Nursing, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

* Correspondence:: ramyaekanayake7@gmail.com

The COVID19 pandemic has presented an unprecedented challenge to many low and middle-income countries' public health, social security, and food security (1). Food insecurity is a situation that exists when people do not have secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth, development and active healthy life (2).

In Sri Lanka, the first case of COVID19 was reported in late January 2020 (3). With COVID19 cases continuing to rise, the World Food Program raised food security concerns among vulnerable sections in Sri Lanka due to the impact and control response of the COVID19 outbreak (4). In 2019, Sri Lanka was ranked 66 among 113 countries in the global food security index, which indicates that food security was an area that required intervention even prior to the COVID19 pandemic (5).

During the prolonged curfew imposed in mid-March 2020, Sri Lanka began to face the impacts of COVID19 on food systems (6), in a dual shock on agriculture markets which has affected both supply and demand (7). Increased levels of food loss and wastage occurred due to market closure and blockages to transport routes (5). According to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka's annual report, weaker earnings from tea, seafood, and other agricultural exports in 2020 exhibited a decline in earnings by 5.1% compared to 2019 (8). The sudden imposition of curfew and its continuation has confined the movement of people to restricted hours. As a result, huge queues occurred after lifting the curfew (5). Year-on-year inflation increased to 6.0% in August 2021 due to high food inflation (11.5%) (9). Normal crop cultivation and harvesting were adversely impacted due to being advised to stay home (42%), being unable to purchase inputs (33%), and poor demand in the market (56%) (10). According to a study, half of the households were either moderately (36%) or severely (14%) affected by food insecurity between December 2020 and February 2021 (10).

To counteract the adversities faced by the COVID19 pandemic, Sri Lankan Government implemented numerous measures to address immediate supply and demand side issues (6). The government allowed farmers to continue with their operations, and approval of the transport of vegetables during curfew hours was helpful to minimize losses (11). Packets of seeds were distributed free of charge in some areas (11). Notably, the "Saubhagya" National Program on Harvesting and Cultivation was launched to develop one million home gardens islandwide (11). However, the World Bank's rapid phone surveys done in 2021 showed that around 44% of households had worried about running out of food. Among this group, more than 80% reduced consumption or ran out of food (12). Also, food price inflation in Sri Lanka remained at elevated levels, making food less affordable (6). A study published in July 2021 showed that, based on the cost assessment of basic breakfast or lunch, the highest rises have been in Sri

Citation: Ekanayake R, Dassanayake, D. Food security in Sri Lanka during COVID19 pandemic. Sri Lankan J. Health. Sci. 2022, 1(1): 63-65. Received: 23.01.2022; Accepted: 03.03.2022; Published: 06.07.2022



Lanka and Pakistan, with over 40% during COVID19. The average cost of a lunch for a family of four has increased by 44.5% based on a table including chicken, eggs, rice and vegetables (13). Also, despite the broad outreach of the policy response to support livelihoods, more than 45% of households indicated that further distribution of food and cash transfers would be helpful (12).

Adapting alternative inputs and marketing strategies, promoting innovative technology, providing immediate financial support, and implementing intervention strategies tailored to farmer heterogeneity would improve the sector's prosperity in a crisis situation (14). Even if the spread of COVID19 begins to ease shortly, we cannot pass it off as a temporary shock. Hence, it is essential to strengthen the food system to face future blows. Furthermore, attention should be paid to developing strategies to efficiently manage national food reserves, which is of utmost importance in the backdrop of a pandemic.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, DD and RE; methodology, RE; validation, DD and RE; formal analysis, RE; investigation, RE; resources, RE; data curation, DD and RE; writing—original draft preparation, RE; writing—review and editing, RE and DD; visualisation, DD; supervision, DD; project administration, DD and RE; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

References

1. World Health Organization. Impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods, their health and our food systems, 2020. <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-10-2020-impact-of-covid-19-on-people's-livelihoods-their-health-and-our-food-systems> (Accessed 18 March 2022).
2. Ayala A, Meier BM. A human rights approach to the health implications of food and nutrition insecurity. *Public Health Reviews*. 2017, 38:10.
3. Wickramaarachchi WPTM, Perera SSN, Jayasinghe S. COVID-19 Epidemic in Sri Lanka: A Mathematical and Computational Modelling Approach to Control. *Comput Math Methods Med*. 2020;2020:4045064.
4. World Food Programme, Sri Lanka, <https://www.wfp.org/countries/sri-lanka> (Accessed 18 March 2022).
5. Ministry of Agriculture. Annual Performance Report 2020. <https://www.agrimin.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/performance/2020%20performance/3.MOA%20FINAL%20REPORT%20-%20ENGLISH%20%202020%20New.pdf> (Accessed 18 March 2022).
6. Central Bank of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's Food Security in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020. <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/news/inflation-in-august-2021-ccpi> (Accessed 18 March 2022)
7. Dissanayaka N, and Thibbotuwana M, Sri Lanka's agri-food trade: Structure, Opportunities, Challenges & Impacts of COVID-19. Feed the future. 2021. Available at <https://www.canr.msu.edu/prci/publications/Research-Papers/PRCI-RP06-SriLanka.pdf>
8. Central Bank of Sri Lanka. External Sector Developments and Policies, 2020. https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb_documents/publications/annual_report/2020/en/9_Chapter_05.pdf (Accessed 18 March 2022).
9. Central Bank of Sri Lanka. CCPI based Inflation increased to 6.0 per cent in August 2021. <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/news/inflation-in-august-2021-ccpi> (Accessed 4 December 2021).
10. Singh N, Scott S, Olney DK et al. Food insecurity among farmers in rural Sri Lanka and the perceived impacts of COVID-19. *Current Developments in Nutrition*. 2021, 5: 248.
11. Marambe B, Silva P. A sixty-day battle to tackle food security – response of the Sri Lankan government to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Sri Lanka Journal of Food and Agriculture*. 2020, 6: 1–5.
12. World Bank. Results from a COVID-19 Rapid Phone Survey In Sri Lanka 2021. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36542/Results-from-a-COVID-19-Rapid-Phone-Survey-in-Sri-Lanka.pdf?sequence=1> (Accessed 6 December 2021).

13. Market Development Facility. What's for breakfast? The COVID-19 crisis and rising food prices, a year on 2021.
<https://marketdevelopmentfacility.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Whats-for-breakfast-FW.pdf> (Accessed 6 December 2021).
14. Rathnayake S, Gray D, Reid J et al. The impacts of the COVID-19 shock on sustainability and farmer livelihoods in Sri Lanka. *Curr Res Environ Sustain.* 2022, 4: 100131.