

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic Response on Food Systems, Health Services, and Health-Seeking Behavior: Results from Phone-based Focus Group Discussions in Rural Kenya

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Impacts of COVID-19 on food systems and food security

THEMATIC PARALLEL SESSION
Tuesday 29 July, 14:20 BST

*Chair: Bharati Kulkarni, NIN
Mackenzie Klema, The University of Edinburgh
Nilupa Gunaratna, Purdue University
Arshad Pal, World Vegetable Center
Prapti Barooah, IFPRI*



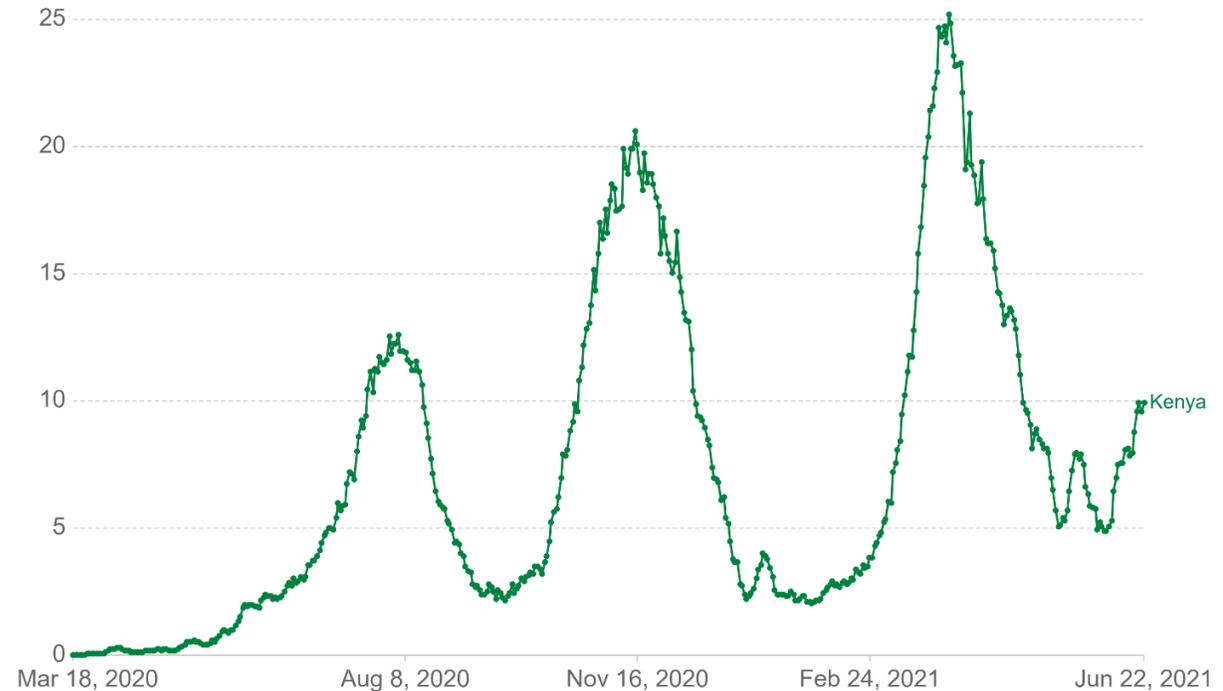
COVID-19 & Kenya

- The COVID-19 pandemic and associated mitigation strategies disrupted food and health systems worldwide
- Early assessments of impact primarily focused on urban populations
- Most relied on phone surveys with non-representative sampling
- Kenya:
 - First case: March 12, 2020
 - Testing is limited and expensive (US\$50-100)

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people

Shown is the rolling 7-day average. The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing.

Our World
in Data



Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data

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Kenya: First wave mitigation strategies

7 PM nationwide curfew
(later relaxed to 9 PM)

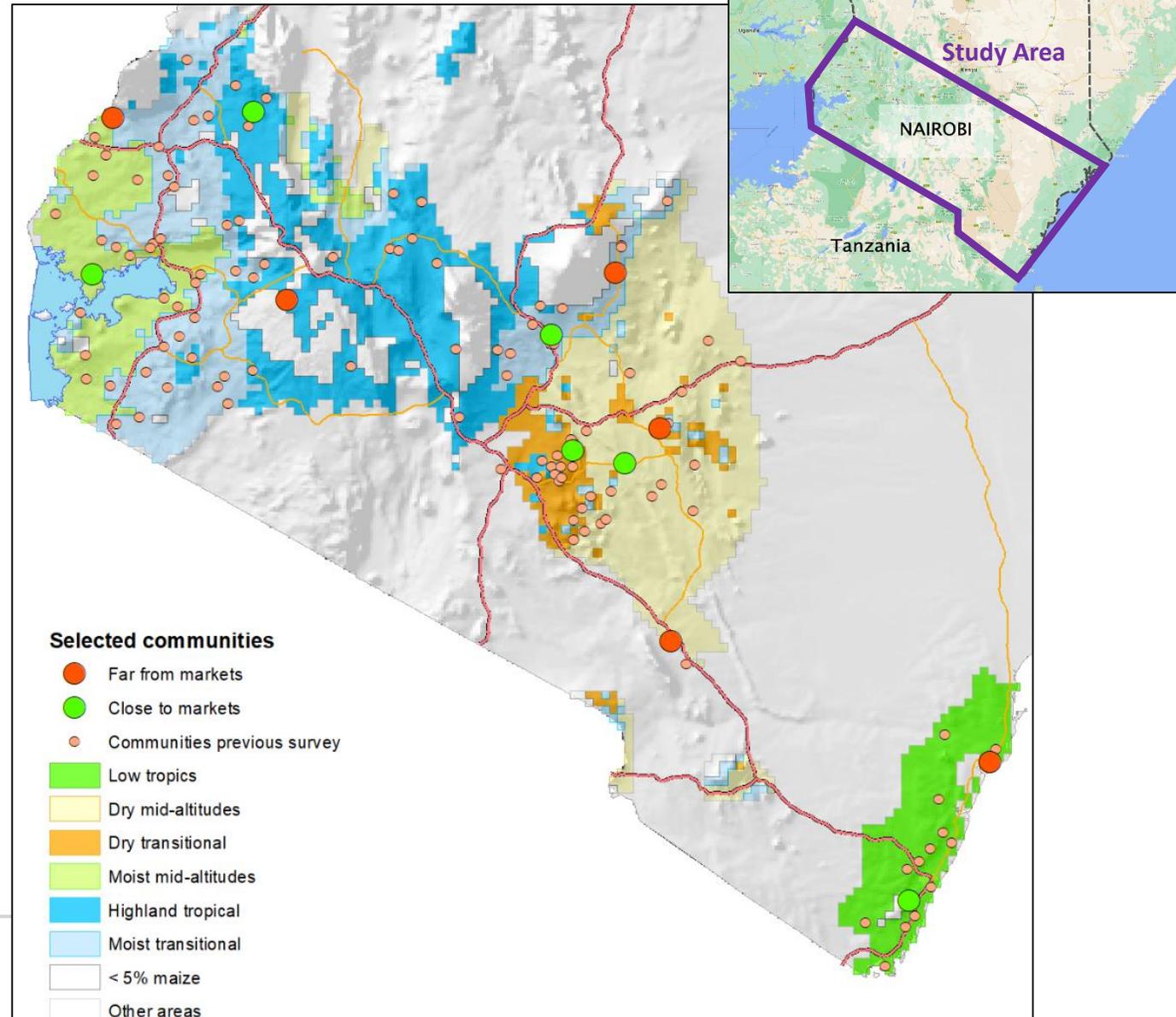
Schools and places of worship closed

Gathering & movement restrictions

- No movement in/out of major metropolitan areas
- Public transportation reduced to 50% capacity
- Permits (paperwork + payment) required to move food
- Food markets closed or required social distancing
- Restaurants only allowed to sell take-away food

Study Aim & Setting

- To describe the pathways through which the pandemic and associated mitigation strategies affected food systems, food security, diets, and health of families in rural Kenya using qualitative phone-based focus group discussions (FGDs)
 - 12 communities were randomly selected from an existing sampling frame of 121 rural communities, representative of major maize production areas, stratified by agroecological zone and distance to cities with more than 100,000 people, indicating access to major markets
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Participants & Procedures

72 participants recruited from the 12 communities

- Gender – three women (n=36) and three men (n=36) from each community
- Farm size – proxy for socioeconomic status

24 phone-based FGDs were conducted in July 2020, after mitigation strategies had been in place for 4 months

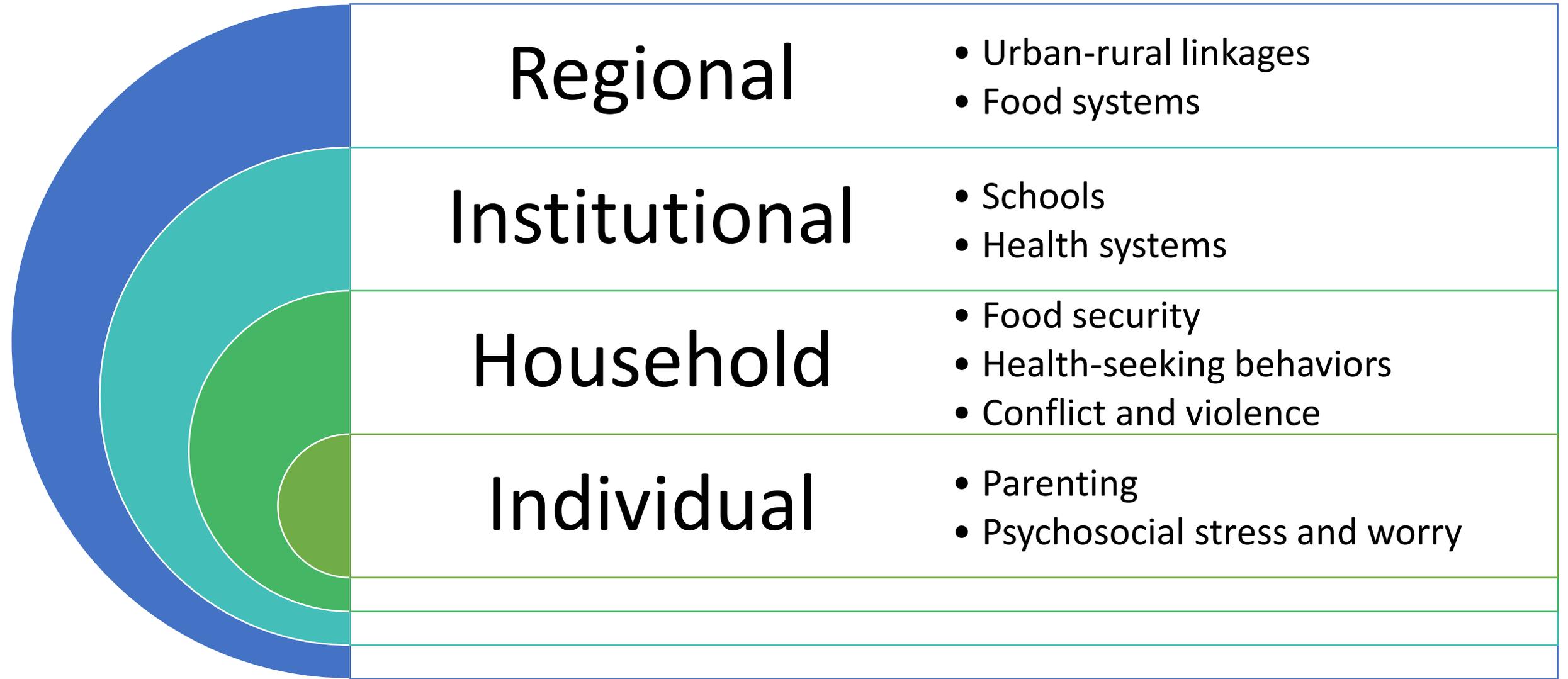
- 12 FGDs with women
- 12 FGDs with men

Guided by the HLPE framework of food systems for diets and nutrition (2017), interview guide topics included:

- Livelihoods, agricultural activities and supply chains (use of inputs and marketing), food prices and access, dietary changes, health services, education, and government programs and services

Each FGD was conducted in Kiswahili, transcribed, translated into English, coded, and analyzed to identify themes

Organizing the Data



Regional and Food System Impacts



Urban-rural linkages:

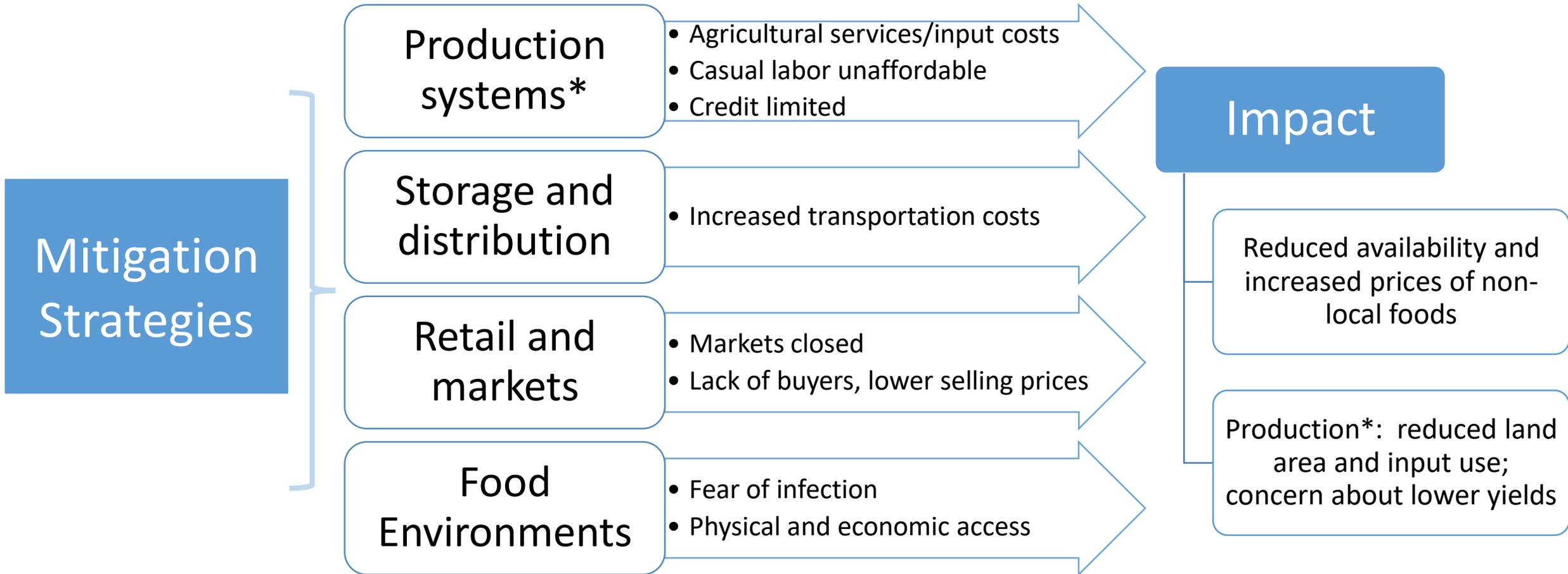
- Remittances to rural households decreased
- Migrants returned home

Rural areas:

- Men reported increased difficulty finding casual work
- Women could not engage in informal food vending and petty trade

*Effects vary by geography/
agroecological zone and whether
planting occurred before or after
restrictions

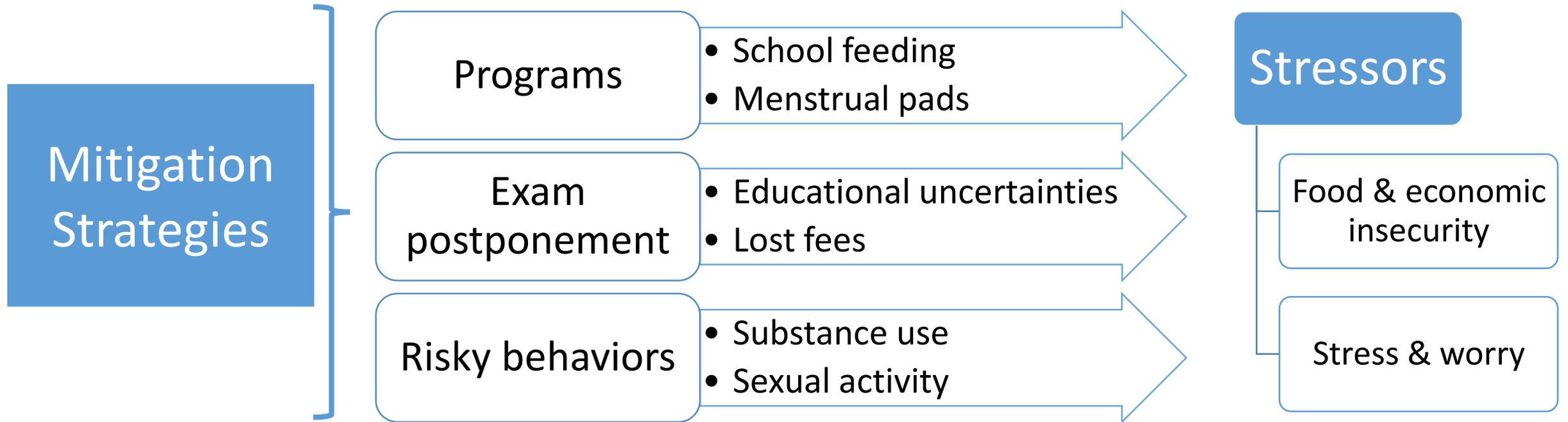
Regional and Food System Impacts



“We didn’t have money to buy fertilizers. ... We planted without fertilizer. That is why we didn’t get a good harvest. It is the reason we don’t have food”

–Male, far from market in dry mid-altitudes

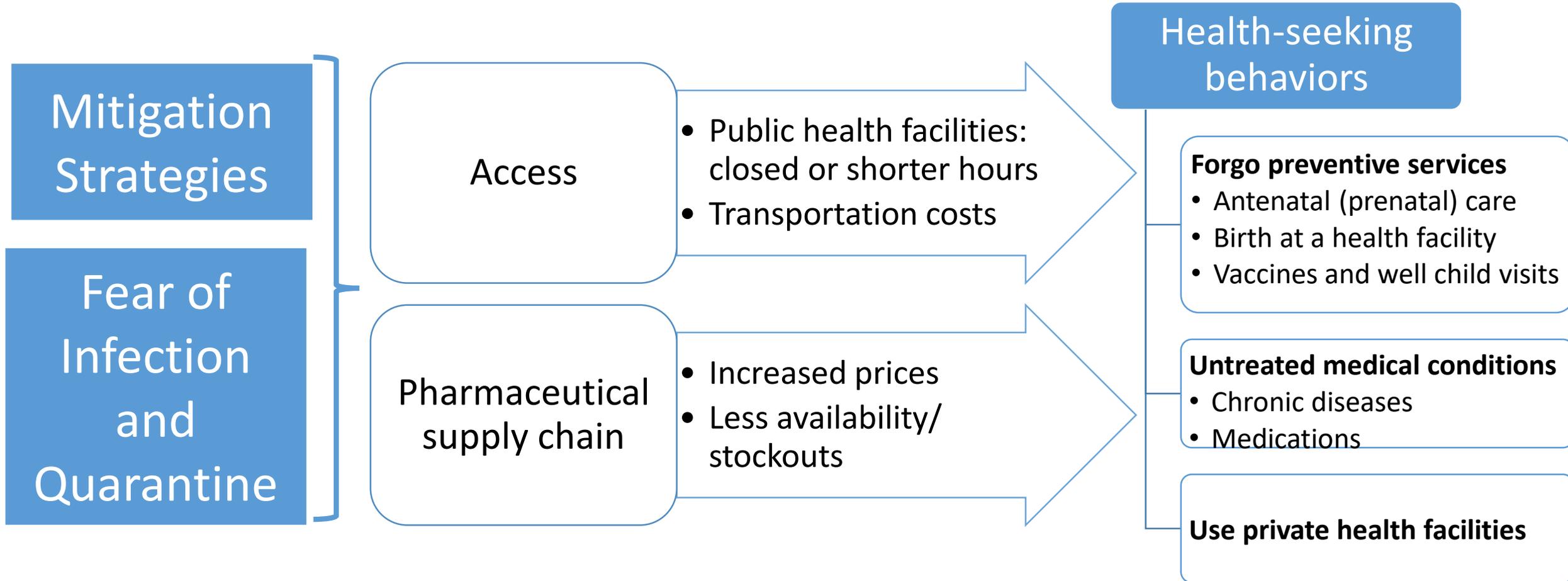
Institutional: School Closures



“our kids are forgetting education and getting other different things. You know when kids are not in school, they tend to follow other people’s behaviors. Now this has affected us mentally and we fear our children’s behaviors might change”

- Female, near market in lowland tropics

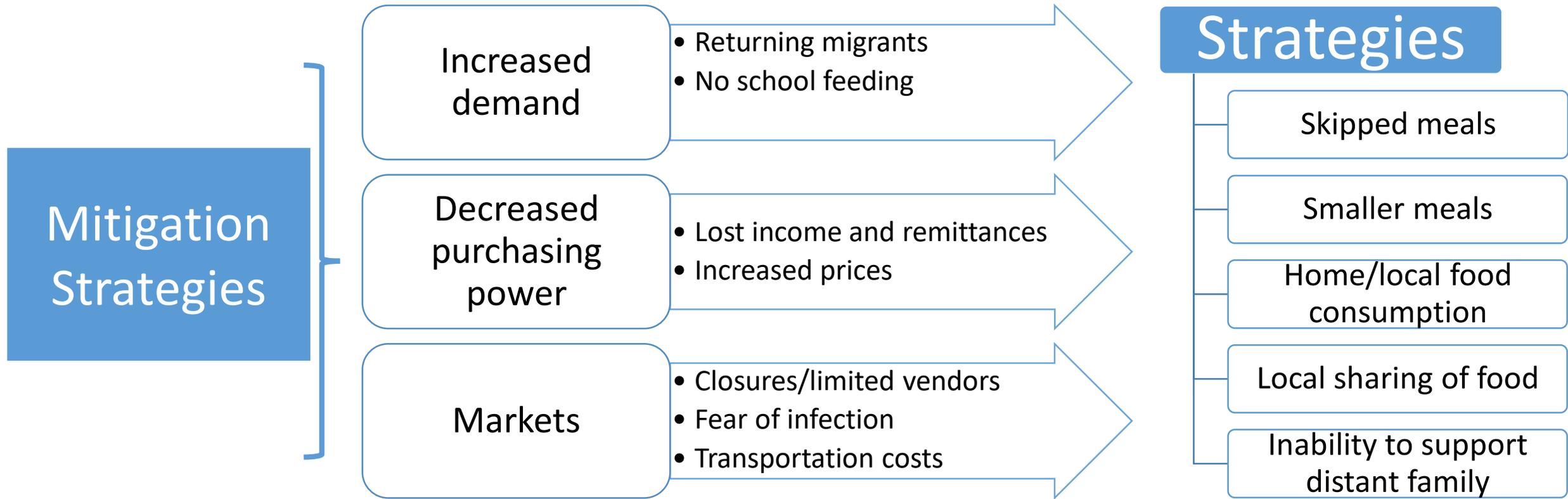
Institutional: Health Systems



“when you want to buy medicine from a pharmacy, you find they are closed.”

- Female, far from market in moist-transitional zone

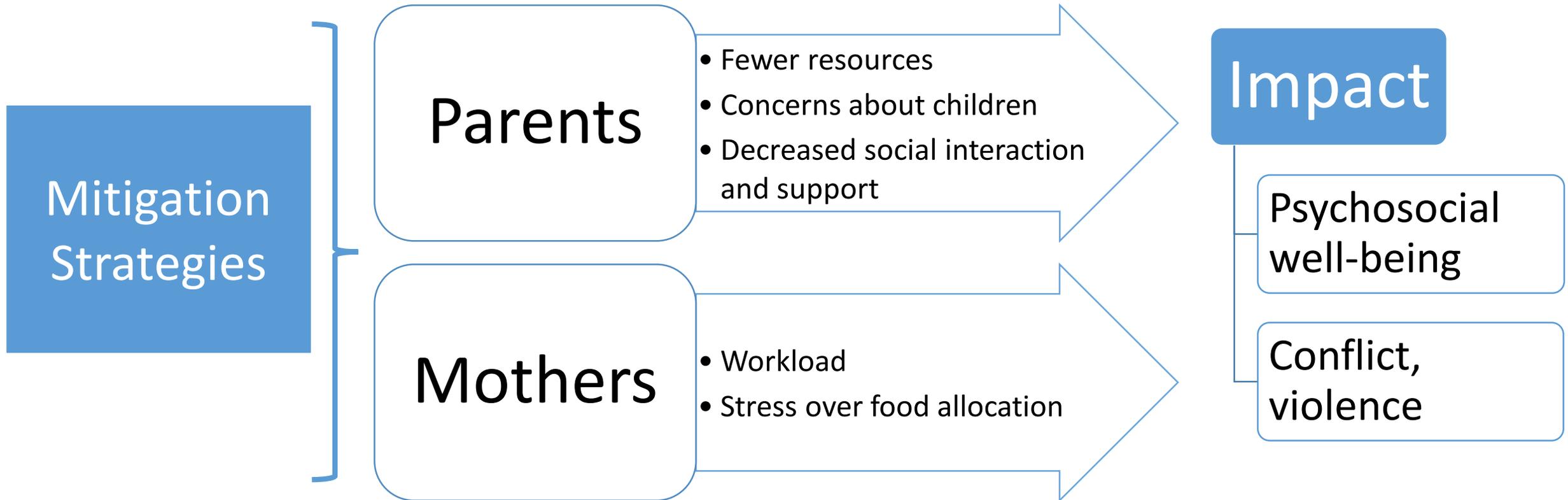
Household Food Security



*“the amount of food cooked nowadays has increased because children are now at home ...
The parents struggle a lot to put food on the table”*

- Male, near market in dry transitional zone

Individual



“you know when there is shortage of money in the house, conflicts have to arise”

- Female, near market in moist mid-altitudes

Conclusions

- COVID-19 mitigation measures **disrupted food systems** in rural Kenya
 - \uparrow food prices + \uparrow household demand + \downarrow income = \uparrow **food insecurity**
 - Longer-term effects possible if:
 - Yields reduced
 - Farmers sell harvest immediately for cash
- **Changes in health services and health-seeking behaviors** can affect maternal and child health and chronic diseases
- **Gender-disaggregation** at all ages is important
- **Qualitative research conducted remotely** can provide important insights

