

The Right to Food and the Impacts of Covid-19

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Covid-19 – Twin Crises

- ❑ Health Crisis
- ❑ Economic Crisis
- ❑ Both together resulting in a food security crisis
- ❑ Pre-covid context relevant:
 - ❑ increasing inequality
 - ❑ high food insecurity + high malnutrition

Pre-lockdown situation in India

- ❑ More than 90% of workers in the informal sector
- ❑ About 80% earn less than Rs.18,000 (~\$240) a month
- ❑ Highest unemployment rate in 40 years
- ❑ High malnutrition rates
- ❑ Reports of hunger and starvation deaths from some pockets (especially since 2015)

On the other hand,

- ❑ National Food Security Act, 2013
- ❑ Strong institutional framework for food entitlement programmes (with gaps however)
- ❑ Mounting foodgrain stocks

National Lockdown – April and May 2020

- ❑ India saw one of the most stringent national lockdowns, (which many are calling an ‘ill-planned’ lockdown) that resulted in:
 - ❑ A massive crisis of stranded migrant workers
 - ❑ A livelihood crisis
 - ❑ A resultant food security/hunger crisis
- ❑ Phone surveys showed very high levels of hunger, reports of starvation
- ❑ Over 200 deaths due to starvation and financial distress reported (March to July)
- ❑ Closure of schools, early childcare centres – taking away one important source of nutrition especially for women and children

Post Lockdown – hunger remains

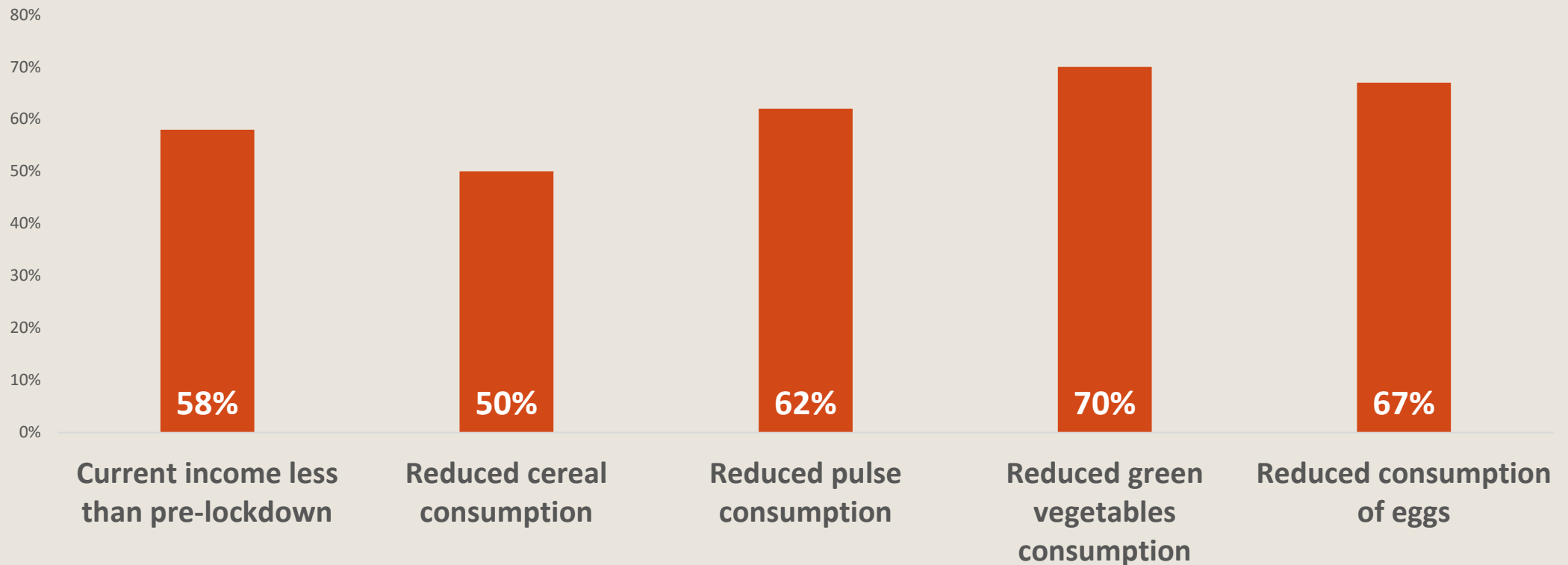
- ❑ 25% reduction in GDP in the first quarter of 2020-21
- ❑ Revival of economic activity still slow
- ❑ Various government support programmes coming to an end
- ❑ Hunger situation still concerning

'Hunger-Watch'

- ❑ An initiative of Right to Food campaign along with a number of civil society organisations
- ❑ Survey focussing on vulnerable groups
- ❑ Conducted in September – October 2020
- ❑ Covered 3492 households (covering 23 states)
- ❑ Research and Action

Hunger Watch – Some Findings

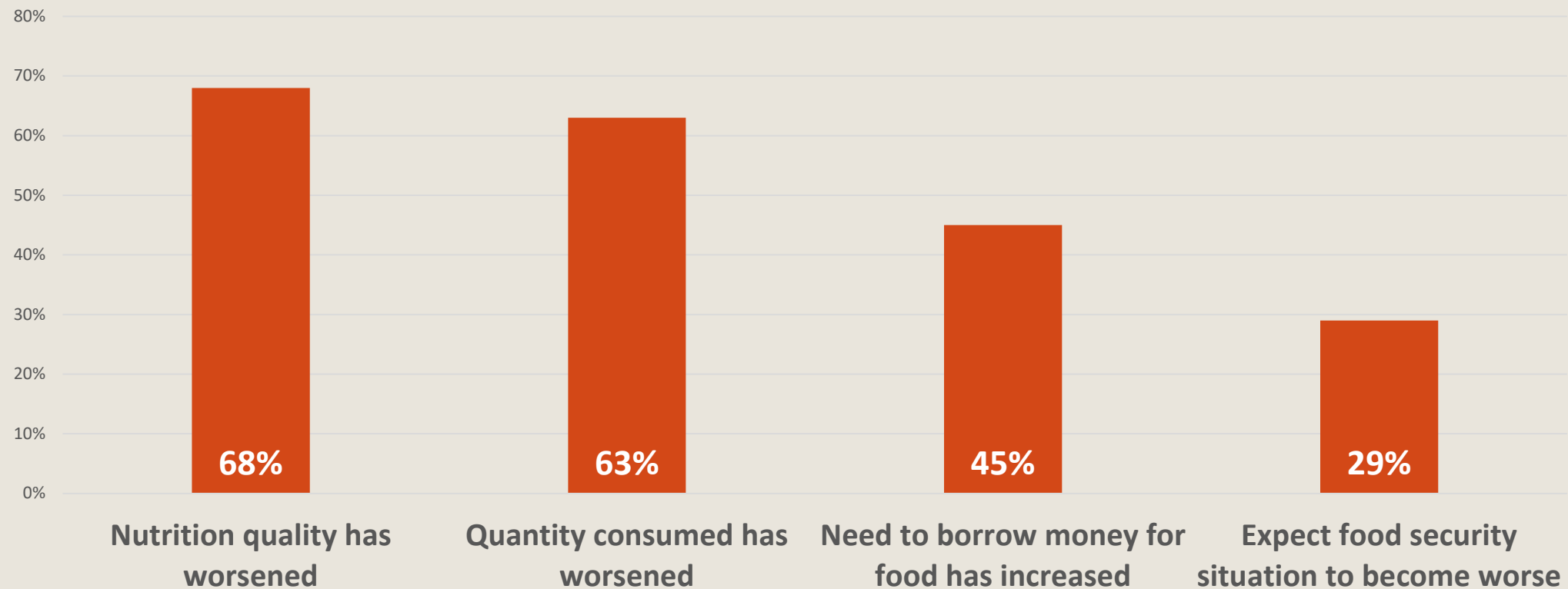
Situation in Sep - Oct compared to Pre-lockdown (Feb - March)



□ 30% households say there is no income (compared to 46% for April – May)

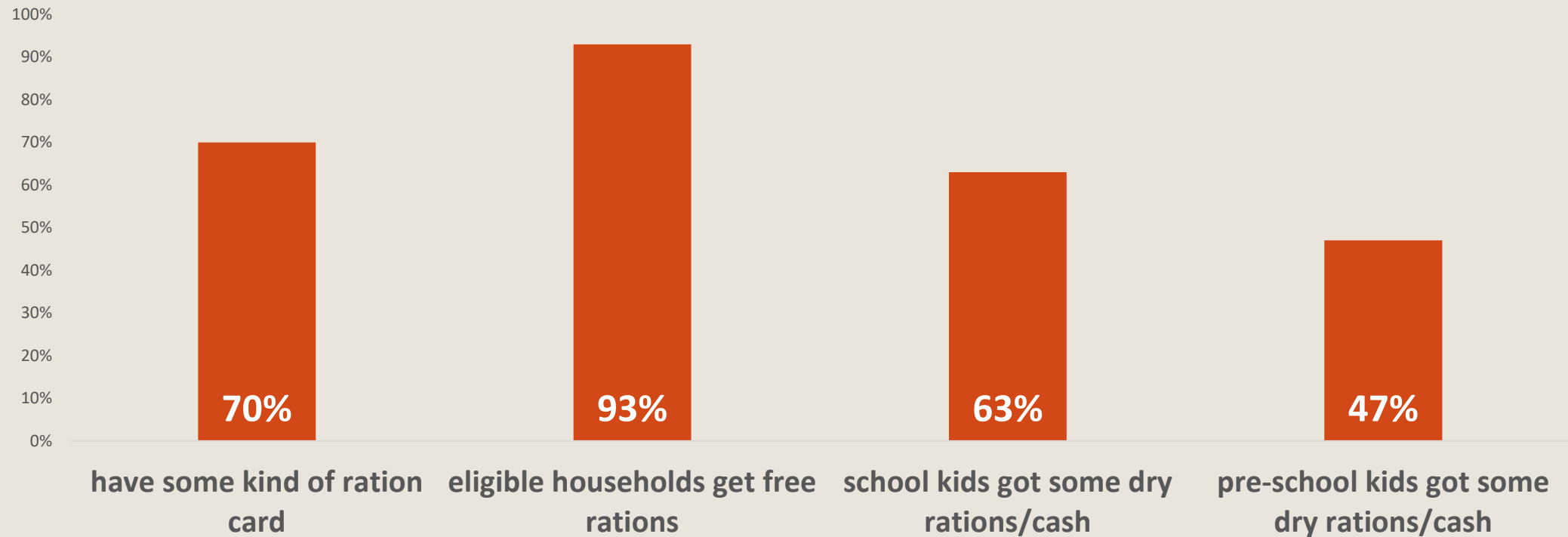
Hunger Watch – Some Findings

Respondents' Perception on Food Security Situation



Hunger Watch – Some Findings

Access to Food Schemes



* School and ICDS meals are related to last 30 days and PDS to the entire period from April

Government Response and Gaps

- ❑ Relief measures – too little, too late? And ending too soon?
- ❑ free foodgrains and pulses, to households covered by National Food Security Act for eight months (ending in November 2020) (800 million persons)
- ❑ For 2 months, additional 80 million migrants without ration cards also promised free foodgrains
- ❑ Exclusions from ration card lists, resulting in people being left out
- ❑ Reluctance to distribute excess grains due to subsidy considerations
- ❑ ‘Reforms’ in agriculture(three new bills introduced)

Looking Ahead

- ❑ Universal entitlements important
- ❑ Covid response rooted in existing structures effective and
- ❑ Can be opportunity to strengthen the social protection/ food entitlements framework + food systems approach
- ❑ Re-imagine procurement and distribution in India towards diverse crops, greater decentralization and local control

THANK YOU!

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