Evidence based on past economic crises and scattered information currently available indicate that the global crisis is likely to have long-term detrimental effects on the lives of children in developing countries. However, data for assessing the effect of the 2008-2009 crisis is limited and readily available to guide the rapid implementation of policies. To address this gap in information, a new UNICEF research initiative was launched in spring 2009 on the impact of the global economic crisis on children in West and Central Africa. This initiative, part of a larger effort to comprehensively study the economic downturn, is an innovative tool that can facilitate an early and immediate response to the crisis in the region.

The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and editors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), unless otherwise indicated.

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This research brief is intended for UNICEF country offices.

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This Research Brief is intended for UNICEF country offices.
Reductions in GDP growth rates in sub-Saharan African economies are mainly attributable to a slowdown in income from international trade and the impact of food and energy price increases. While the crisis led to falling import prices, they only partly offset the impacts of higher export prices. Some countries included in the study experienced positive economic growth last year at rates that are much lower than those observed in the pre-crisis period. The results of simulations highlight the impact of the global crises followed different patterns and that the recovery processes are also affected by primary commodity prices. Cameroon’s growth rate is predicted to return to pre-crisis levels in 2010, recovery of the pre-crisis growth levels in Burkina Faso and Ghana are expected to be delayed until 2011.

The global crisis and the well-being of children in West and Central Africa

The social and economic consequences of the crisis vary very substantially among countries and among individuals within the same country. However, in every context children are particularly at risk of paying high costs as economic shocks negatively affect household resources and their allocation by the government to social services. Especially in the least developed countries, where social safety net programmes are lacking or weak, economic opportunities are restricted and public fiscal space is extremely limited, children are at great risk of experiencing a deterioration in living standards and nutrition, being withdrawn from school and work, and losing access to services.

The model developed for the study in West and Central African countries allowed researchers to simulate the potential impact of the global crisis on different indicators of the living standards of children in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Ghana. The results are summarised below and have been taken from Collier, Florea and Hueth (2010).

Monetary poverty

While the estimates for the three countries show that the global crisis has resulted in increases in poverty growth rates rather than in negative growth, the simulations suggest negative outcomes for the individual countries, resulting in increasing poverty levels (see figure 1). Among the countries included in the study, it is Ghana where the child monetary poverty levels are predicted to increase the most and to follow a consistently increasing trend across the period 2009–2011. While the results from the simulations for 2011 show poverty rates that are 2.5 percentage points higher than the estimated poverty rates in 2009. The poverty levels are predicted to increase by 1.3 percentage points in Burkina Faso and 1.2 percentage points in Cameroon.

The model adopted in the analysis, which simulates the impact on household consumption and income poverty, assumes a reduction in school attendance and child labour. The model adopted in the analysis, which simulates the impact on household consumption and income poverty, assumes a reduction in school attendance and child labour.

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In 2009, UNICEF launched a research project to develop and apply a combined macro-level and micro-level approach to simulate the impact of the global economic crisis on children in three countries of West and Central Africa – namely Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Ghana. The research was carried out using data from international and national sources from the Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) Research Network and the International Centre for Research on Poverty (CIRP). A predictive model was developed to simulate the impact of the global crisis on dimensions of child well-being (i.e. monetary poverty, insufficient food consumption and risk of hunger, school participation, child labour, and access to health services, and to indicate alternative policy response options over the period 2009–2011. The study is among the first attempts to use economic models to simulate the impact of macroeconomic shocks on children. It proposes an innovative tool for an early understanding of the impacts of macroeconomic shocks on child well-being.

The three countries in West and Central Africa included in the study represent some of the diversity of economic characteristics in the region. Burkina Faso is a landlocked country with little integration into the world economy, mainly exporting agricultural raw materials such as cotton; Cameroon, a moderately integrated country where social safety net programmes are lacking; and Ghana, a highly integrated country with a relatively large informal sector.

The social and economic consequences of the crisis vary substantially among countries and among individuals within the same country. While every context children are particularly at risk of paying high costs as economic crises negatively affect child health care, food resources and allocated by the government to social services. Especially in the least developed countries where social safety net programmes are lacking or weak, economic crises threaten public food supply and are extremely limited, children are at great risk of experiencing a deterioration in living standards and nutrition, being withdrawn from school and put to work, and losing access to health services.

The model developed for the study of West and Central African countries allowed researchers to simulate the potential impact of the global crisis on different indicators of the living conditions of children in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Ghana. The results are summarised in figure 1 and have been taken from Cbuskirk, Polaine and Hostetler (2010).

Monetary poverty

While the estimates for the three countries show that the global crisis has resulted in a slowdown in GDP growth rather than in negative growth, the simulations suggest some negative effects for the individual countries, resulting in increasing poverty levels (see figure 1). Among the countries included in the study, it is Ghana where the child monetary poverty rate increased the most and it is also the country where reductions in GDP growth were the most pronounced. Results from the simulations for 2011 show a 5.8 percentage points increase higher than the estimated impact of poverty in 2009, raising from slightly less than 34 per cent to around 40 per cent. Even in Burkina Faso (12,000 additional children 7-10 years old) and Cameroon (18,000 more children 7-10 years old), the estimated impact on household resources, predicts a moderate increase in monetary poverty by 2011. In absolute numbers, slightly less than 1 million children. Compared to the pre-crisis base year, simulated increases in child poverty in Burkina Faso and Cameroon are more pronounced than in Ghana but still substantial, at 4.9 and 3.3 percentage points, respectively, among 293,000 and 173,000 additional children, respectively. In Ghana, the poverty increase is primarily driven by the reduction in consumer purchasing power, following an increase in food prices, and by a large increase in income from non-agricultural self-employment. In contrast, in Burkina Faso the driving force is more in income from agricultural self-employment, while in Cameroon the driving forces of the poverty increase are more varied. In the two latter countries, poverty levels are not raised substantially due to high risk of child labor. In Ghana, poverty increases are more pronounced in absolute numbers, but in relative terms, are lower than in the two other countries.

The social and economic consequences of the crisis vary substantially among countries and among individuals within the same country. Where social safety net programmes are lacking or weak, economic crises threaten public food supply and are extremely limited, children are at great risk of experiencing a deterioration in living standards and nutrition, being withdrawn from school and put to work, and losing access to health services.

The impact of the crisis on household resources and public support may affect children’s participation in school. The estimates for the base year show school attendance rates for children aged 6-10 at slightly more than 60 per cent in Cameroon and Ghana, and at much lower levels in Burkina Faso. These figures were accompanied by high levels of children involved in labour activities (slightly less than 50 per cent in Burkina Faso, 37 per cent in Cameroon, and 24 per cent in Ghana). The model adopted in the analysis, which simulates only the impact on households’ resources, predicts a reduction in school attendance of around 0.8 percentage points for children aged 7-10 in Burkina Faso/120 additional children 7-10 years old out of school, and an increase in participation in public activities by 1.1 percentage points (18,000 more working children 7-10 years old). A reduction of around half a percentage point is also expected for the attendance rate of children aged 11-15, with a slightly more pronounced increase in public participation (10.5, or 16,000 more children 11-15 years old).

In Cameroon and Ghana the effects of the crisis on school participation and child labour are expected to be negligible.
In 2008, UNICEF launched a research project to develop and apply a combined national and sub-national economic model to simulate the impact of the global economic crisis on children in three countries of West and Central Africa—Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Ghana. The research was carried out under the auspices of international and national researchers from the Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) Research Network and the UNICEF-supported Research Brief. A predictive model was developed to simulate the impact of the global crisis on different dimensions of child well-being (i.e., monetary poverty, insufficient food consumption and risk of hunger, school participation, child labour, and access to health services), and to indicate alternative policy responses. The study’s findings are summarized below and have been taken from Cockburn, Lafortune and Saisana (2010).

The three countries in West and Central Africa included in the study represent some of the diversity of economic conditions in the region. Burkina Faso, a landlocked country with little integration into the world economy, mainly exporting agricultural raw materials such as cotton; Cameroon, a medium-sized country with substantial exports of natural resources such as oil and timber; and Ghana, well integrated into the global economy and exporting both agricultural goods (cocoa and natural resources such as gold and timber) and manufactured goods resulting from foreign investments over the past decade. The results of the simulation exercises are summarized in the following sections.

### Impacts of the crisis on West and Central African children

From late 2008, there were clear signs that the global economic crisis was spreading to many developing countries, leading to a sharp reduction in global demand and, subsequently, in the energy and food prices that immediately preceded it. In January 2009, the World Bank and 15 other international donors pledged $1 billion to help sub-Saharan African economies stave off a deeper crisis. The average household with consumption lower than the respective national poverty line.

Reductions in GDP growth rates in sub-Saharan African economies are mainly attributable to a slowdown in investment, to a much greater extent than a reduction in consumption. While the crisis led to falling import prices, it also partly offset the major reductions in export prices and volumes, foreign direct investment inflows, remittances and foreign aid. In 2009, all the countries included in the study experienced positive economic growth, but at rates that are much lower than those observed in the pre-crisis period. The results of the simulations highlight that the impact of the global crisis followed different patterns and that the nature and extent of the impacts vary. Cameroon’s growth rate is predicted to return to pre-crisis levels in 2010, recovery of the pre-crisis growth levels in Burkina Faso and Ghana are expected to be delayed.

The global crisis and the well-being of children in West and Central Africa

The social and economic consequences of the crisis vary very substantially among countries and among individuals within the same country. However, in every context, children are particularly at risk of paying high costs as economic instability and poverty affect household resources and allocation by the government to social services. Especially in the least developed countries where social safety net programmes are lacking or weak, economic opportunities are restricted and public fiscal space is extremely limited, children are at great risk of experiencing a deterioration in living standards and nutrition, being withdrawn from school and put to work, and losing access to health services.

The model developed for the study on West and Central African countries allowed researchers to simulate the potential impact of the global crisis on different indicators of the well-being of children in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Ghana. The results are summarised below and have been taken from Cockburn, Lafortune and Saisana (2010).

**Monetary poverty**

While the estimates for the three countries show that the global crisis has resulted in a moderate increase in the growth rate rather than in negative growth, the simulations suggest some common trends for the individual countries, resulting in increasing monetary poverty levels (see figure). Among the countries included in the study, it is Ghana where the child monetary poverty rates are expected to increase the most and to follow a chronologically increasing trend. The growth rate from the period 2008-2009 to the period 2009-2010 from the simulations for 2011 shows a difference higher than the estimated growth rate of 1.1 percentage points, growing from slightly less than 34 per cent to around 40 per cent, which translates into additional children living in poverty. The deterioration is even more dramatic other compared to the reduction in child poverty predicted in a scenario where the crisis is absent. The total potential effect of the crisis is predicted to result in an increase in around one third in the total number of children living in monetary poverty by 2011, an absolute numbers, slightly less than 1 million children.

Compared to the pre-crisis base year, simulated increases in child poverty in Burkina Faso and Ghana are more moderate than in Ghana but still substantial, at 9.4 and 3.3 percentage points, respectively. In Burkina Faso, around 250,000 and 173,000 additional children, respectively, are predicted to fall into poverty by 2011. In Ghana, the poverty probability is primarily driven by the reduction in consumer purchasing power, following an increase in food prices, and by a large drop in income from non-agricultural self-employment. In contrast, in Burkina Faso the driving force is an increase in income from agricultural self-employment, while in Cameroon the driving force of the poverty increase is more varied. In general, the predicted impacts on poverty due to reductions in income from wages and remittances from migrants are relatively modest. In Burkina Faso, rural areas are at higher risk of increasing child poverty levels, while in Cameroon, and especially Ghana, the greatest increases in poverty levels are expected in urban areas. In all countries it is predicted that pre-existing large stigmatized vulnerabilities will grow.

#### Ineffective food consumption and risk of hunger

This crisis has the potential to affect the economic resources of households, increase monetary poverty and influence child well-being in terms of the quantity and quality of food consumed. The effects of the crisis in terms of food price and child poverty are illustrated by the decrease in school participation and child labour activities (slightly less than 50 per cent in Burkina Faso, 31 per cent in Cameroon and 24 per cent in Ghana).

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Access to health care

The microeconomic model also enabled analysis of the potential impact of the crisis on the use of health care facilities. The results of the simulations suggest that the crisis has a negative effect on access to health care for children in households with a lower level of income and with a diverison towards lower quality services. This was particularly evident in Burkina Faso, where the consultation rate for any kind of health facility is estimated to have declined from 67.1 per cent of sick children using health facilities in the base year (preceding the crisis) to 56.5 per cent in 2010, when the year of effect on access is predicted to be the highest. This reduction corresponds to an approximate decrease of 52,000 children not seeking health assistance.

Policy responses

A number of possible policy options to counteract the negative effects of the crisis on child well-being were examined and simulated using the microeconomic model. The overall cost of the different policies simulated for Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Ghana amounts to 1 per cent of GDP for each country. Among the different policy interventions (or combinations of policies) that could be implemented, a universal or regionally targeted transfers to all children aged 0-5 are a potentially effective way to intervene relatively quickly in improving child well-being. With the same amount of public spending (1 per cent of GDP), a cash transfer provided universally to all children aged 0-5 is estimated to lead to a reduction in child monetary poverty that is substantially similar to that resulting from a tax transfer targeted to children aged 0-4 identified as poor (see figure 3).

This policy brief is based on the analyses presented and discussed in the following document:


Additional references

Universal or regionally targeted transfers to all children aged 0-5 are a potentially effective way to intervene relatively quickly in improving child well-being. With the same amount of public spending (1 per cent of GDP), a cash transfer provided universally to all children aged 0-5 is estimated to lead to a reduction in child monetary poverty that is substantially similar to that resulting from a tax transfer targeted to children aged 0-4 identified as poor (see figure 3). The cash transfer is also estimated to improve the situation of children in regions where child poverty is more widespread. As there are no additional costs related to the allocation of a cash transfer provided universally to all children aged 0-5, and the results of the simulations suggest that this policy is likely to be more cost-effective in improving child well-being in the regions where child poverty is more widespread, cash transfer programmes for children aged 0-5 are recommended as the preferred intervention in such cases. The effect of a cash transfer programme for children aged 0-5 is estimated to be very effective in reducing the rate of children subject to an insufficient caloric diet by more than 1 percentage point. The cash transfer programme is not limited to the current phase of the crisis and full capacity will be trained and made available in the countries examined. Among them, targeted cash transfers to poor children, appear to be the most promising in offsetting the impact of the crisis, particularly in Burkina Faso and Cameroon, where food subsidies are expected to be less efficient in improving the situation of poor children, especially in Cameroon.

Different policy options to counteract the effects of the crisis were explored. Among them, targeted cash transfers to poor children appear to be the most promising in offsetting the impact of the crisis, particularly in Burkina Faso and Cameroon, while food subsidies are expected to be less efficient in improving the situation of poor children, especially in Cameroon.

Universal or regionally targeted transfers to all children aged 0-5 is a potentially effective way to intervene relatively quickly and cost-effectively to reduce child poverty and deprivation. Especially in countries where institutional capacity is weak, a universal or regionally targeted cash transfer programme is likely to be more effective than a means-tested cash transfer programme that may face implementation challenges and be less effective in reaching the most vulnerable children.
The microeconomic model also enabled analysis of the potential impact of the crisis on the use of health-care facilities. The results of the simulations suggest that the crisis may have a negative effect on access to health care for children in areas with a higher percentage of children living with a diversion towards lower quality services. This was particularly evident for Burkina Faso, where the consultation rate for any kind of health facility is expected to decline from 61 per cent of all children using health facilities in the base year (preceding the crisis) to 50.5 per cent in 2011, when the year the effect on access is predicted to be the highest. This reduction corresponds to an approximate increase of 600,000 children not seeking health assistance.

**Policy responses**

A number of possible policy options to counteract the negative impact of the crisis on the child were explored in the model.

- The overall cost of the different simulated policies was presented in the study, with a particular focus on the potential reduction in child poverty and caloric poverty.
- Different policy options to counteract the effects of the crisis were explored, including school attendance, child labour, and cash transfer programmes.
- The effects of these policies were estimated, with a focus on the potential reduction in child poverty and caloric poverty.

**Global Economic Crisis and Child Poverty Effects and policy options in West and Central Africa**

Evidence based on past economic crises and scattered information currently available indicate that the global crisis is likely to have long-term detrimental effects on the lives of children in developing countries. However, for assessing the effect of the 2008–2009 crisis, policymakers are critically in need of guidance on policy options to respond to and mitigate the impact of the crisis. In order to address this gap in information, a "macro-micro" simulation framework was developed. It has been applied in innovative research tool – a “macro-micro” simulation framework which considers the roles of food subsidies and cash transfers to offset the impact of the crisis. This framework has been applied to assess the potential impact of policy interventions, around 259,000 additional children are at risk of falling into poverty in Burkina Faso, 173,000 in Cameroon and 130,000 in Ghana by 2010.


**Impact of global economic crisis on child poverty in West and Central Africa**

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