

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) is holding a special session on ‘COVID-19 and its Impacts on Global Food Security and Nutrition’ on the 14th of October. Yet a coordinated international political response to COVID-19 impacts on food security is still awaited. The pandemic has shed light on the vulnerabilities and lack of resilience of failing food systems, especially those highly dependent on imports or exports. As Action Against Hunger put forward immediate impacts of COVID-19 on the humanitarian world, food security and human rights in its July report¹, we can now anticipate long term consequences, which **will add 83 to 132 million to the already alarming number of 690 million hungry people**². Impacts observed by Action Against Hunger missions (with examples of DRC and Pakistan in this brief) echo global observations made by the High Level Panel of Experts on food security³ and call for the same set of recommendations. States must engage now for a deep transformation of food systems to ensure the right to food for all as well as resilience towards the spread of this crisis, and the ones to come, in light of climate and biodiversity challenges. This engagement should be made within the framework of the CFS, the most inclusive and legitimate governance fora for food security matters.

A CRISIS OF ACCESS TO FOOD & NUTRITION

MASSIVE LOSS OF INCOME & LIVELIHOODS

The closure of borders and markets have had collateral impacts on people with precarious livelihoods. Physical (containment measures, disruption of supply chains...) and financial (income loss, food price rise) inability to access healthy and diverse food struck the most vulnerable, especially women, refugees, and displaced persons.

While many urban and informal workers lost their jobs, food prices remained higher than usual, even after borders reopened and containment measures were lifted. The combination of high food prices and the loss of income undermined the purchasing power of vulnerable households.

In rural areas, family farmers, unfavoured by sanitary measures compared to industrial and long production chains, struggled to move their production to markets. Due to poor storage infrastructure, a huge amount of perishable food was wasted and farmers lost all livelihoods.

LACK OF SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

The disruption of social protection schemes, such as the closure of schools canteens, further increased risks for those “one meal away” from food insecurity. Other traditional coping mechanisms to adapt to depleted food supplies, such as seasonal migration, reliance on agricultural employment on larger farms, and participation in self-help and tontine systems, were also unavailable, though central to the resilience of the poorest. An additional 71 to 100 million people are likely to fall into extreme poverty as a direct consequence of the pandemic by the end of 2020⁴

COVID-19 impacts on Nutrition

Perishable foods chains, such as fruits and vegetables, meat, milk or dairy products have been particularly impacted : they often require many people to work in close proximity to cultivate, harvest and process. Those fresh products are highly nutritious and essential to healthy diets.

Informal markets had to close due to containment measures, reflecting a “formality bias” in policies, which favoured supermarkets because they were perceived as safer. Yet informal markets play a central role in ensuring access to diversified and nutritious foods. This further undermined access to local healthy diets.

We thus observed a change in consumption habits, moving towards cheaper, **more processed food** with less nutritional value, which impacts malnutrition rates in the long run.

¹ Action Against Hunger, [Covid-19 impact: the seeds of a future hunger pandemic?](#), July 2020.

² SOFI, 2020.

³ HLPE, [Impacts of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition: developing effective policy responses](#) 2020

⁴ World Bank. [Global Economic Prospects](#), June 2020

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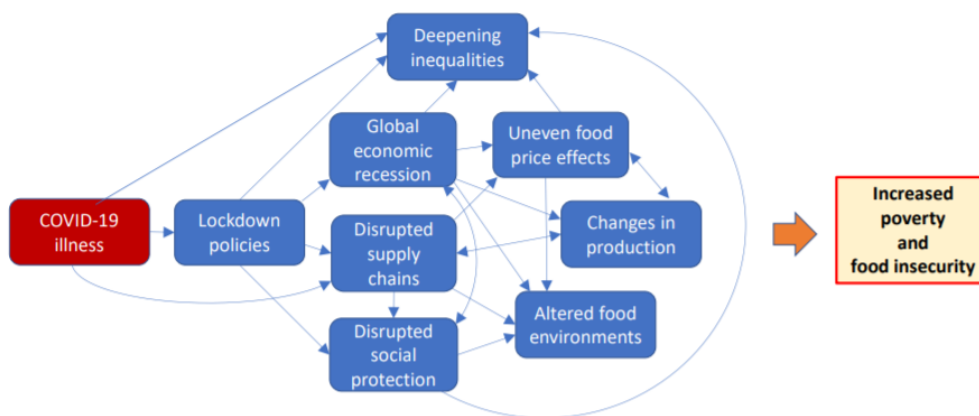
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THREAT TO FUTURE FOOD PRODUCTION

The COVID-19 crisis is also characterized by a lot of uncertainties. Given the breakdown of some food supply chains (including those relying heavily on migrant labour), producers have been unsure when and what to sow. Plus, a direct result of negative coping strategies, family farmers had to sell cattle, or eat seeds stocks (thus preventing a second harvest), because of a lack of access to inputs (quality seeds, animal feed...). Other coping strategies entail an over-exploitation of natural resources and habitats, which collectively threatens future food production capacity⁵.

The dynamics of COVID-19 that threaten food security and nutrition (source : HLPE)



A CRISIS OF RIGHTS

WOMEN, FARMERS AND WORKERS AT THE FRONTLINE

The crisis is affecting rights as well as access to basic services (water and sanitation, health care, jobs) of vulnerable people, starting with women, who are over-represented in the informal and food-processing sector, migrants and discriminated minorities. All basic services mentioned have implications for food security and nutrition.

Although governments recognize food and agriculture as essential sectors, pandemic containment measures were biased against the centrality of peasant production, artisanal fisheries, small-scale herding, and local food systems. The particular conditions and needs of indigenous peoples, women food producers and workers, and young people were not reflected in policy measures⁶.

IMBRICATION OF CRISES AND THREATENED ENVIRONMENT

The COVID outbreak comes on top of a climate and biodiversity crisis, for which industrial food systems hold high responsibility. Yet members of the Civil Society Mechanism of the CFS observed a resurgence in land grabbing following the pandemic, as eyes were elsewhere. These land grabs are linked to the expansion of industrial agriculture, itself associated with a rising prevalence of zoonoses—diseases that transmit from animals to humans⁷—of which COVID-19 is a prime example.

⁵ HLPE, *Impacts of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition: developing effective policy responses to address the hunger and malnutrition pandemic* 2020

⁶ CSM, *Voices from the ground: from COVID-19 to radical transformation of our food systems*, 2020

⁷ UNEP, ILRI, CGIAR, *Preventing the next pandemic - Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission*, 2020

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DIRE NEED FOR HOLISTIC FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

As a quarter of humanity already faces moderate or severe food insecurity, it is high time to recognise that current food and agriculture policies and strategies failed. More than lacking resilience, the globalised and industrialised food system is responsible for the climate and biodiversity crises, and outbreaks such as COVID-19. We demand an end to food systems organized around capital accumulation of few agroindustrial multinationals, and instead demand food systems organized and governed around the principles of agroecology, food sovereignty and the right to food of individuals and communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS, DONORS, AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- **REVISE CURRENT FOOD SYSTEMS TOWARDS MORE FOOD AUTONOMY**

According to geographical contexts, it is crucial to develop local agriculture for local consumption as much as possible, for countries to be less dependent on imports and exports and less vulnerable to international price fluctuations as well as possible disruptions along the food chain. It is also crucial to rethink food production in one territory to ensure better integration between rural and urban territory and goods circulation.

- **PUT AGROECOLOGY AT THE CORE OF FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION**

to enable family farmers to be less dependent on external inputs and more resilient to crises. Countries should facilitate the production, exchange, and use of farmer seeds. Agroecology is also the only option to preserve biodiversity and well-functioning ecosystems while halting the climate crisis and adapt to future shocks, in a “One Health” approach.

- **SUPPORT LOCAL FARMERS AND MARKETS**

to ensure the continuity of accessible, safe, affordable, nutritious, and healthy food for all, through territorial markets. Support should be financial as well as in-kind (local seeds, agricultural inputs, etc.) or training-sessions in agroecological methods. It also entail effective participation in food governance.

- **SET UP STRONG SAFETY NETS & SOCIAL PROTECTION**

Existing social protection programmes should be scaled up or developed for vulnerable populations and households, including producers and food chains workers. Immediate measures must be put in place to improve the purchasing power of the most vulnerable.

- **UPKEEP THE CFS IN ITS INTERNATIONAL ROLE**

To coordinate international political responses regarding this food security crisis. Countries must support the CFS in order to prioritise this crisis at the agenda and ensure truly ambitious political processes on *Food systems and Nutrition, Agroecology and other innovative approaches*.

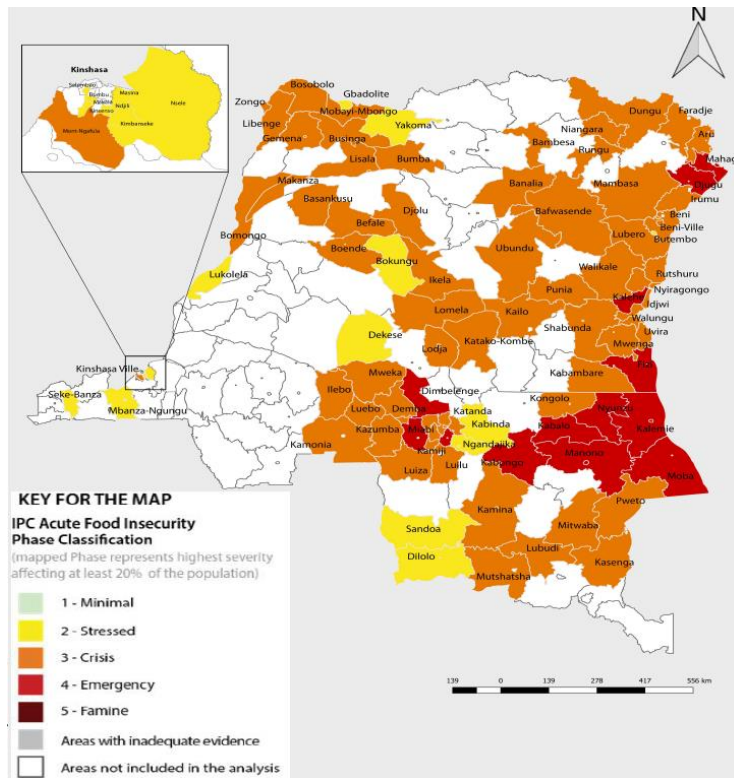
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COUNTRY FOCUS: DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO



The number of people who are facing high levels of acute food insecurity has increased from 15.6 to **21.8 million people** for the current period (June to December 2020, source IPC). This figure includes 5.7 million people classified in IPC Phase 4 (EMERGENCY), 33% are facing high levels of acute food insecurity, classified in IPC Phase 3 or 4 (Crisis or worse).

The Food Security Cluster (July 2020) underlines this situation is due to several factors. On top of *COVID impacts listed below*, population displacements due to conflicts (Ituri, North & Kivu, Tanganyika), refugees and returnees (Kasaï, Kasaï Oriental), Climatic extremes, plant diseases, epizooties and Ebola, were already causing massive disruptions for food and nutrition security.

- *Decrease in local production and post-harvest losses;*
- *Reduced access to inputs (broken supply chains);*
- *Loss of income (seasonal workforce, informal jobs);*
- *Lack of market access (closed markets, curfews, limited displacements);*
- *Increase in food prices (staples): combined with the income loss, it results in a decreased purchasing power:*

For example, in Bunia (Ituri), a price surge affected all staple food (cassava, corn flour-local or imported, palm oil, beans) immediately after the announce of anti-COVID measures. This price surge attained up to 50% for beans, and 100% for local corn. Prices have since decreased, yet they remain higher than the same period last year. Only cassava seems to be back to normal.

In Tshikapa (Kasaï), there is a similar trend: the price of vegetable oil (mostly imported from Angola) has doubled. The price of imported rice has increased of 21%. Most local crops (cassava, beans, local corn flour) have known a slight decrease in May – June, which corresponds to harvest months, but prices are re-increasing fast since and are higher than last year (Source: WFP).

These abnormal variations, associated with massive loss of income worsen food insecurity. Impacts on post-harvest loss will probably be significant since trade was slow and crops have not always been bought, in contexts where producers do not have the possibility to store goods. This could also affect mycotoxins contamination rates (linked to humidity rates), with a direct incidence on stunting rates for children. All impacts on food security will translate in deteriorated nutrition. The nutrition Cluster targets 2.4 million people, an increase of 36,8% compared with the pre-COVID situation (1.87 million for the humanitarian response). Yet according to the Cluster, most needs remained uncovered.

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COUNTRY FOCUS: PAKISTAN

On top of COVID-19, in 2020 Pakistan is also facing flooding, recurrent heatwaves, long term drought, water insecurity and salinity, as well as a locust invasion. Food systems were already facing challenges with 100% of the market in crisis in February 2020 (WFP Market Monitor). 63% of the population was food insecure (National Nutrition Survey 2018).



At the Farmer Field School, during a Community Mobilization session on Kitchen Gardening in Jamot Village, Tando Allah Yar, August, 2020

Agriculture was severely affected despite early exemption from lockdown. This ranged across the entire food system:

Pakistan is dependent on interprovincial

and international markets for inputs and sales. High levels of inflation have already directly impacted subsistence farmers, and their ability to procure inputs. This was further exacerbated by the crisis.

- Seeds and fertilizer availability was limited for the spring sowing season. While input traders were exempted from lockdown, they could not obtain items from international sources, and local inputs are of low quality due to a lack of focus. Some farmers sowed late, while others reported sowing more than once due to failure of the crop;
- For internationally linked goods, planning was also problematic, as progressive farmers, those most likely to adapt to market conditions, faced challenges in predicting the market later in the year. For example, at national scale, cotton alone contributes to 2% in GDP, yet with the closure of cotton industries and the uncertainties regarding exports, producers have been unsure what to sow and no policy guidance was given.
- For interprovincial goods, policies to reduce interprovincial movement resulted in lack of basic goods in provinces such as Balochistan, which rely on neighbouring provinces for core goods.

Perishable markets were immediately impacted, with dairy, fruit and vegetable, and livestock farmers facing immediate challenges to sell their goods. The availability of perishable foods was limited in urban areas, with high food prices emerging quickly.

Wheat was already facing a crisis in the country with interprovincial sales banned in January to better manage the supplies available. The Government is a key procurer of wheat, through its food ministries. However, due to the impact of COVID on transportation coming at the same time as the wheat harvests in the south of the country, farmers faced storage challenges while waiting for the Government to collect the wheat. This, along with a shortage of skilled farmers, resulted in post-harvest losses. The impact of this will likely emerge later in the year, with the Government currently procuring large stocks of wheat from outside, but with potential implications on the price of wheat by the end of 2020.

These challenges primarily affected the quarter of the population below the poverty line and the 39% of the labour force reliant on agriculture (Asian Development Bank, 2020). 58% of the population reported such impacts (Pakistan Humanitarian Forum-National Humanitarian Network, 2020) and 95% reported significant changes in their eating habits, including reliance on less preferred foods, borrowing, reducing meal size and frequency. Wasting is already at 18%, while stunting is affecting 40% of children (NNS, 2018): this will likely increase in the coming months as the protracted impact on food systems emerge.

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