

Inputs to the 2021 High Level Political Forum

CFS Chairperson's Summary

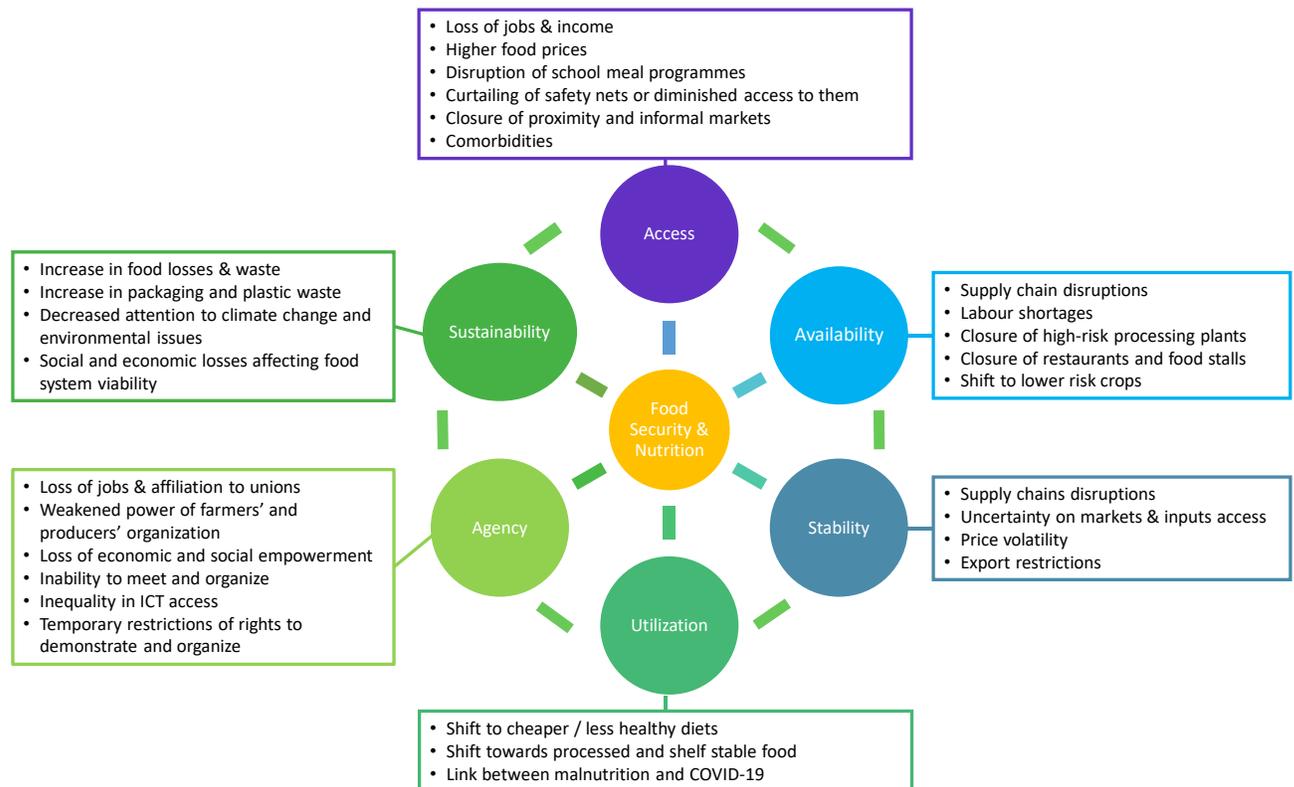
The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) took action early on with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, recognizing the immediate negative spill-over effects of the pandemic on global food security and nutrition. With the intention of drawing public attention to the threat of rising hunger and malnutrition rates due to COVID-19, and to help prevent a full-blown food crisis, the CFS Chairperson requested the CFS High Level Panel of Experts to produce an “Issues Paper” to specifically explore effective policy responses in light of the pandemic. In March 2020, the CFS Chair also issued a [Statement on COVID-19](#), held extra-ordinary open meetings to address the implications of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition, and to highlight specific actions taken by CFS Advisory Group members and others. CFS also organized open expert meetings on specific themes such as “resilient food supply chains and workers’ health during COVID-19. All of these products and more are available on the CFS public [website](#).

The CFS contribution to HLPF for 2021 is presented by the CFS Chairperson as a summary of the CFS HLPE Issues Paper on the “Impacts of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition: developing effective policy responses to address the hunger and malnutrition pandemic.” This paper reflects the work of the CFS HLPE; its content and recommendations were not negotiated by CFS members and stake-holders through a formal policy convergence process.

CFS HLPE products are the result of a continuous dialogue between CFS HLPE experts and a wide range of stakeholders (public, private and civil society sectors), combining different forms of knowledge, building bridges across regions and countries, and across various scientific disciplines and professional backgrounds. Their reports and other products are available on their public [website](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic is undermining efforts to achieve SDG 2

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness and there is no evidence that food itself is a vector of its transmission. However, the virus, and measures to contain its spread have unleashed a number of overlapping and reinforcing dynamics that are affecting all dimensions of food security and nutrition, as depicted in the diagram below.



Source: CFS-HLPE

The food security and nutrition risks of these dynamics are serious. Already, before the outbreak of the pandemic, according to the latest *State of Food Security and Nutrition* report (FAO *et al.*, 2020), some two billion people faced food insecurity at the moderate or severe level. Since 2014, these numbers have been climbing, rising by 60 million over five years.

The complex dynamics triggered by the lockdowns intended to contain the disease are creating conditions for a major disruption to food systems, giving rise to a dramatic increase in hunger. The most recent estimates indicate that between 83 and 132 million additional people (FAO *et al.*, 2020)—including 38-80 million people in low-income countries that rely on food imports (Torero, 2020)—will experience food insecurity as a direct result of the pandemic. At least 25 countries, including Lebanon,

Yemen and South Sudan, are at risk of significant food security deterioration because of the secondary socio-economic impacts of the pandemic (FAO and WFP, 2020). In Latin America, the number of people requiring food assistance has almost tripled in 2020 (UN, 2020a). Food productivity could also be affected in the future, especially if the virus is not contained and the lockdown measures continue.

It is vital that the global community continue to monitor the situation closely, respond in necessary ways to avert the worst outcomes with respect to food security and nutrition, and carefully consider how to build more resilient food systems and ensure the right to food, in order to achieve SDG 2.

The following recommendations seek to provide guidance for how to proceed along these lines.

1. Implement more robust targeted social protection programmes to improve access to healthy and nutritious foods (*linkages to SDG1*)

Priority actions include:

- Provide adequate emergency food aid, wherever possible with local and regional purchase of foods for food assistance.
- Provide debt relief to governments struggling to maintain necessary social safety nets.
- Maintain robust social safety nets recognising that household food expenditures rise and fall in relation to other expenditures (e.g. on housing, health care, education, etc.).
- Design food assistance programs that offer adequate access to healthy food, not just sufficient calories.
- Whenever possible, provide alternatives to school lunch programs when schools are closed.
- Allow for adequate access to health care, including access to mental health services, in the design and implementation of social safety nets.

2. Ensure better protections for vulnerable and marginalized food system workers and farmers who are disproportionately affected by the crisis (*linkages to SDG8*)

Specific recommendations include:

- Ensure food system workers' rights are recognized and integrated in national legislation; promote and enforce compliance with the norms.
- Ensure food systems workers have access to full protection from hazards and risks (in terms of personal protective equipment, distancing measures, clear health and safety guidelines, paid sick leave, adequate sleeping, eating and sanitary facilities, quarantine shelters).
- Pay special attention to migrant workers in the food system to ensure they are protected from health risks, have access to health services and social protection.
- Implement mechanisms to protect farmers and small-agricultural producers from uncertainties and income losses, such as specific insurances, transfers and inputs distribution.

3. Provide better protections for countries that depend on food imports (*linkages to SDG10*)

Specific recommendations include:

- Discourage food export restrictions to protect countries reliant on food imports.
- Provide policy space and support to countries seeking to improve their domestic food production capacity within their ecological boundaries in the medium and longer-term.
- Encourage countries to build up better long-term grain storage capacity.

4. Strengthen and coordinate policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic impact on food systems and food security and nutrition, including at the international level (*linkages to SDG17*)

Specific actions to support this recommendation include:

- Recognize the role of the CFS as a lead body in coordinating an international governance response to the impact of COVID-19 on FSN.
- Create a task force led by the CFS to track the food security impacts of COVID-19.
- Establish a reporting system for CFS member states to share information and experiences with respect to the impact of COVID-19 on FSN in local and national contexts.
- Develop a global campaign to educate and inform the public on nutrition-sensitive practices to prevent and manage COVID-19 infections at household and individual levels.
- Include food system workers and agricultural producers' organizations in COVID-19 decision processes at national and international levels.

5. Support more diverse and resilient distribution systems, including shorter supply chains and territorial markets (*linkages to SDG9*)

Specific actions along these lines include:

- Invest in enhanced territorial market infrastructure at the regional, national and local levels.
- Carefully review policies that may unjustifiably privilege formal retail food outlets over more informal markets that provide points of connection between small producers and lower income consumers, including periodic rural markets and street vendors.
- Consider adopting stronger regulation, including competition policy, to empower small and medium agrifood enterprises (SMEs) to participate in national, regional and global supply chains.

6. Support more resilient food production systems based on agroecology and other sustainable forms of food production (*linkages to SDG12*)

Specific recommendations include:

- Invest in more agroecological research-action projects.

- Support the development of an agroecology curriculum at schools of agriculture in a range of countries.
- Given that the majority of agricultural development assistance projects support conventional or industrial agricultural approaches, work to support more projects that encourage agroecology and other sustainable forms of agriculture.
- Include support for individual and community responses, such as home and community gardens.
- Ensure sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, as well as animal production and forestry, are integrated in policy responses to COVID-19 so as to reap their full potential in terms of nutrition and livelihoods.