



COVID-19 FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION: RESPONSES BY CFS ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS TO AVERT A GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS – 13 MAY 2020

PRESENTATIONS SUMMARIES

Martin Cole, Chair of the CFS High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) Steering Committee, highlighted the panel's key understandings of the impact of COVID-19 on the global food security and nutrition situation, which will be included in its "2030 Synthesis Report" to be released in late-June 2020.

He also noted that the pandemic has affected people's "access" to food supplies more than "availability" due to closures, lock-downs, and movement restrictions for both agriculture workers and some inputs. He stressed the added risks and burdens on regions and countries already afflicted by acute food security problems, singling out Africa as being at particular risk.

He pointed out that market forces have led to very efficient supply chains, under normal circumstances, but acknowledged their low level of resilience to such a major global health crisis like COVID-19. Cole underscored the likelihood of "millions (being pushed) into poverty and food insecurity, and urged governments to prioritize social inputs and social support mechanisms for the most vulnerable populations. In closing, Cole identified the urgency of global food system transformation, and the need to accelerate the pace towards more sustainable and resilient systems.

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Martien Von Nieuwkoop, Global Director, Agriculture and Food Global Practice, World Bank, reiterated the irony of the world hunger situation:

- Rising hunger in a world of plenty as global crop markets are well supplied and relatively stable.
- Rising food insecurity going hand in hand with rising food loss and waste

He noted that the situation is driven by supply chain disruption and income losses, with hotspots facing multiple crises of locusts' invasion, conflict and drought. The World Bank is mobilizing large scale financial packages that come in various waves and formats. The first one was a health sector response to the tune of about \$14 billion mainly focusing on the short One Health sector but also laying a foundation for preventing the next pandemic. The Bank is also putting in place a Locust Response Program to the tune of a half a billion dollars to support countries in East Africa and Middle East to respond to the locust crisis. It also has a \$160 billion second phase response to mitigate the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 that has three pillars.

- Supporting the poor and vulnerable households,
- Supporting private sector and companies
- Macro and fiscal with the idea to grow back better.

In these areas, the Bank is reaching about a billion people already and providing mainly cash transfers to make up for the income losses. It is also providing lots of complementary services to tackle food security including logistics, E-extension, support for SMEs, provision of agricultural inputs and community-driven development project where self-help groups can play an important role to help governments respond to the crisis.

On food systems, the Bank is thinking of four areas that particularly need attention to build back better.

1. investing in sustainable intensification to reduce the impact of agriculture on the environment and natural habitats that might amplify the risk of zoonotic diseases
2. Providing a strong enabling and policy framework for healthy diets as there is a link between unhealthy diet, obesity, non-communicable diseases, pre-existing conditions and morbidity of COVID-19.
3. Aggressively building resilience when it comes to output markets, looking at the digitization of food supply chains that will enable farmers and consumers to interact directly. As well as when it comes to the input markets, reducing farmers' dependence of external inputs by moving climate smart agriculture and agronomy approaches towards the circular economy.
4. Look at the effectiveness of the \$700 billion a year that the world provides to the agricultural sector and the food system and look at how it can be repurposed for better nutritional and environmental outcomes.

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Maximo Torero, Chief Economist, FAO, stated that during the first phase of COVID-19, the containment phase, labour-intensive commodities (e.g. high-value commodities) were affected because of the disruption of labour and health issues related to the labour force. Capital-intensive commodities, like cereals, were not affected.

He noted that logistical problems are being resolved with export restrictions being lifted in many countries and that high levels of stocks of staples (rice, wheat, maize, corn and soybeans) also create a significant buffer and there should not be any problem in terms of staple availability.

Torero explained that during the second phase, the phase of consequences, problems of food access are faced as a result of lockdown and economic recession. He indicated that the IMF simulations of GDP growth, with a reduction of 3% at world level, are very optimistic due to high probability of a second wave of the pandemic and assumptions of significant growth in South Asia, Asia, and China – where recovery is not expected to be as fast as foreseen. This will also be impacted by reduced growth in some African countries which highly depend on primary exports of commodities, the prices of which have dropped.

Conservative simulations in net food-importing countries, with a GDP decline of 2%, 5% or 10%, lead to an increase of the number of undernourished people by 14, 38 or 80 million respectively. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are very vulnerable due *inter alia* to high dependency on revenues from tourism and remittances, which have dropped.

He called for the need to link health, food and development, with an opportunity to change things for the better, e.g. create value chains that are efficient and productive. The priority is to meet immediate needs of vulnerable populations with cash transfers and safety nets, also adjusting trade and tax policies. The focus should be on productive issues and the identification of alternative markets noting that there is a risk for production to be lost in the field because there is no market. Interregional trade should also be promoted to create a new demand for these produce that will not be sold in traditional countries. Governments should also reassign incentives to ensure that people have access to proper diets.

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Sheila Grudem, Deputy Director Emergency, WFP, described what WFP is experiencing and actions that it is taking to address the needs of those who are in acute situations. She highlighted the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer a health crisis only, it is also a humanitarian crisis, and WFP is seeing an exponential growth in the COVID-19 cases in Africa, where some of the greatest needs are.

She referred to ILO's estimates that up to 1.6 billion people could lose their livelihoods this year. She also underscored the negative effects on food security caused by movement restrictions, loss of employment and income, school closures, and disruptions of basic services as consequence of the pandemic.

She described how WFP continues to adapt its programs and delivering mechanisms to ensure food assistance to about 100 million people. For example, distributions are being staggered to limit the groups of people together; or in other places, food and cash distributions are for two months. WFP is also piloting some very innovative solutions with door-to-door deliveries; and whilst schools are closed it is switching school meals to take home rations and cash transfers. Despite these efforts, she reported that projections are that up to 130 million people could be driven into severe food insecurity/hunger as a result of COVID-19 and the economic impacts. Therefore, WFP together with FAO and UN Country Teams are launching food security assessments to better understand what those impacts are going to be.

In face of this evolving situation, she informed that WFP is scaling up its preparedness plans. It has about three million metric tons of food in stock, in storage or in transit, and it is calling forward over 400 staff for deployment in country offices to support field operations.

To conclude, she underscored that the restrictions of global movements is affecting everybody's ability to provide humanitarian assistance. In response to tighter border controls and commercial transport disruptions, WFP is also expanding its supply chain infrastructure and assets and partnerships to serve the wider humanitarian and health community, to facilitate

global movement of humanitarian and medical cargo, to provide air transport services for humanitarian community and health responders, and to ensure medical evacuation services by air and over land ambulances for the entire humanitarian and health community.

Ronald Hartman, Director Global Engagement, Partnership and Resource Mobilization, IFAD, highlighted that the current crisis is particularly exposing the fragility of local food systems and that it is key to keep food flowing both to rural and urban populations at affordable prices.

He underlined the interconnections between rural poverty, urban food security and the functioning of food systems. The livelihoods of many rural people are largely connected to production food processing and distribution, and therefore, food security of urban people largely depends on the work of small scale farmers and rural workers.

Small scale farmers and poor rural people have very limited assets to be able to cope with such shocks and fragility. In this context, the importance of small and medium enterprises in delivering services and providing support to small scale farmers and rural households was also recognized.

Mr. Hartman stated that IFAD is looking at the COVID-19 crisis through three lenses:

1. The emergency response is focusing on containment measures, providing emergency support and services so that people can meet immediate needs.
2. The recovery response deals with investments in support to food systems function, to promote employment in order for people to generate income and purchase food.
3. The systemic response is intended to provide economic support, to improve resilience and reduce inequalities, tackle climate change, address environmental challenges, and improve food systems.

IFAD's overall response to COVID-19 has four predominant pillars.

1. First, the immediate response is to repurpose ongoing programs to ensure that resources are allocated to enable people to build resilience and to facilitate early recovery.
2. Second, provision of information and knowledge about what type of policies to cope and address and build resilience in times of crisis.
3. Third, in line with its role as development fund, one pillar concerns the provision of funds.
4. Fourth, the establishment of a rural poor stimulus facility that focuses on trying not to lose the developmental gains and ensuring that we transition from an emergency response to recovery as soon as possible.
 - a. The rural poor stimulus facility is designed to improve food security and the resilience of those poorest and most affected by the COVID-19 crisis.
 - b. The facility is intended to ensure the provision of inputs and other productive services to smallholder farmers, facilitated access to markets, financial services and opportunities to generate employment, and to strengthen rural connectivity and make sure that there is dissemination of digital technologies.

- c. An initial investment of US\$40 million was made to kick start this facility, and it is estimated that this will come to around \$200 million. The facility will be delivered through IFAD's government partners and through non-governmental partners.

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David Laborde, IFPRI Senior Research Fellow, described his institution's work to monitor national policy-making in response to COVID-19, with a focus on coping mechanisms put in place especially to protect vulnerable segments of the population most severely impacted by the crisis and how value chains are being disrupted.

Using field data and direct observations from partner NGO's, IFPRI is helping to recommend context-specific interventions to mitigate the social and economic damage caused by the pandemic. Despite the serious damage, Laborde underscores the resilience of the global food system, for which major investments and diversification over time has actually softened what could have been even worse reactions.

Nonetheless, extreme poverty numbers are increasing at an alarming rate, with urban poor struck even harder than rural populations. Laborde raised particular concerns about the impact of the pandemic in Africa, for which well-targeted interventions are needed. Given the loss of incomes for many around the world, including consumers and producers, managing the economic fall-out of such a global health crisis should focus on social protections for the most vulnerable populations, to ensure social safety nets and other economic protections.

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Francesco Branca, Director Nutrition and Food Safety (WHO) called on the need to double efforts to provide adequate support to the estimated 10 million wasted children who add up to the current 47 million and raised attention to the potential increase in the number of stunted children, which is expected to be 700,000 for each percentage point of drop in countries' GDP.

He described WHO's role in providing leadership on the health related response to the pandemic by sourcing medical equipment and supplies to help member states access global markets which are overwhelmed by unprecedented demand; and by supporting the installation of COVID-19 treatment centers. Jointly with UNICEF, WHO guidance is also being provided on community based health care and clinical management of severe acute respiratory infections when COVID-19 is suspected in breastfeeding women.

Dr. Branca also highlighted WHO's normative role in developing guidance for national food safety authorities, as well as agri-food businesses, on how to optimize food control functions and protect the health of food workers along the food production chain. He concluded with a

reflection on the need to seize the opportunity to transform food systems that nourishes people while at the same time regenerating and sustaining the environment.

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Nettie Wiebe, CFS Civil Society Mechanism (CSM), noted that there's increasing evidence in all parts of the world that the most affected by this health feeding economic crisis are the very same people who have been most at risk before. COVID-19 highlights and exacerbates the horrific structural inequalities, discrimination, exploitation, racism and sexism, which were already in place before all of this happened. She emphasized that COVID-19 teaches the world that food and health go together and that these are indivisible human rights that can't be traded off. Smallholder family farmers, fisher folk, pastoralists, indigenous people, and other small scale food producers who provide most of the food consumed globally are the central entry point for a coherent global response to the food crisis.

CSM is looking at five policy areas for consideration:

1. People should be at the center of policy solutions, workers and especially migrant workers, women, smallholders, food producers, indigenous peoples, urban food providers, refugees, displaced people, those are the people that are most affected by this crisis and they have to be at the center of our policy considerations.
2. Support for local and resilient food systems.
3. Continue to fight inequalities, all the national and international efforts to address the new crisis, have to help to reduce inequalities within and between countries.
4. Strengthen public systems and policies.
5. Recognize that the food systems are interconnected.

In conclusion, she noted that there's an urgent need for an enhanced regional and global policy coordination convergence and coherence and improved mutual accountability and that CSF is the foremost inclusive intergovernmental and international platform on food security and nutrition and is best placed to contribute to mutual learning and collective analysis and develop a global policy response to the food crisis that accompanies COVID-19.

Brian Baldwin, CFS Private Sector Mechanism (PSM), noted that the private sector mechanism has been monitoring and gathering information from its members particularly in the supply chain. They agree with the other presenters on the importance of making sure that imports continue to move, that farmers have access to the necessarily inputs and to markets, keeping food moving and the importance of the supply chains.

He stressed the importance of addressing issues of urban food security, fragile supply chains and information flow especially on prices of commodities and the capacities of E-Systems. He also expressed the PSM concerns about jobs that are at risk, particularly in some of the high value crops like tea, fruits and coffee.

He welcomed the meeting's strong endorsement of looking at new approaches including climate smart agriculture, improving resilience, the importance of warehousing and infrastructure, the role of efficient value chains, and the importance of digital information that farmers can use to know when and how they can go to market.

Ruth Richardson, Executive Director of the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, highlighted their commitment to achieve food system transformation, stressing the role of the RBAs and in particular of the CFS as central mechanism for this change.

In relation to actions taken to address the COVID-19 crisis, the Global Alliance and its 30 philanthropic foundations are working to create more flexible and adaptable funding mechanisms to supporting rapid emergency responses, by showing best practices around the globe to amplify, aggregate and connect interventions at all levels, as well as to strengthen local supply and employment.

She underscored that the Global Alliance through comprehensive participatory process, prioritized actions on five key topics from food system transitions to nature-based solutions and to sustainable diets, including topics such as subsidies and incentives.

She also recognized the importance of articulating a new and very powerful and comprehensive narrative, which includes issues that are all interconnected such as biodiversity, food loss, climate change, COVID-19, hunger, etc. to respond to the need of addressing them by using a "systems perspective". Ms Richardson noted that as the response to the pandemic requires shared responsibility and the urgent inclusive involvement of everyone, the crucial and huge task of building healthier equitable and resilient food systems requires more democratic and more integrated ways of managing risks and governing food systems. In this context, she reiterated the critical role of CFS, and the interest of the Global Alliance in engaging with CFS where mutual sense of urgency and common cause are identified.
