VOICES FROM THE GROUND:
FROM COVID-19 TO RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF OUR FOOD SYSTEMS

2020
VOICES FROM THE GROUND: from COVID-19 to radical transformation of our food systems

IMPRESSUM

Working Group on Global Food Governance of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSM) for relations with the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy

www.csm4cfs.org

Coordination

Thierry Kesteloot and Nora McKeon
Facilitation team of the CSM Global Food Governance Working Group

Drafting team

This report has been produced by the CSM Working Group on Global food governance in cooperation with the CSM Women and Youth Working groups

Lead authors and editors:

Kirtana Chandrasekaran, Shalmali Guttal, Thierry Kesteloot, Andre Luzzi, Nora McKeon

Other members:

Aida Jamangulova, Joana Dias, Heather Elaydi, Judith Hitchman, Nadia Lambek, Sophia Murphy, Saul Vincente Vasquez, Veronica Villa, Shinely Varghese, Azra Sayeed, Nettie Wiebe, Julia Spanier, Teresa Maisano

This report has particularly benefited from the report of the CSM Women’s Working Group drafted by Jessica Duncan and Priscilla Claeyts and by the Youth Declaration drafted by the Youth Working Group

Thanks to the support of the CSM Secretariat

Collective contributions were provided by:

CSM constituencies and sub-regions.

Inputs were made by a number of organizations and networks including:

Aardeboercensument, ARWC, Biowatch, COFFACE, COODDEFFAGOLF, COPROFAM, ECVC, El Poder del Consumidor, FIAN, ETC Group, FOEI, IFOAM, Focus on the Global South, HIC, ICFS, IITC, IUF, LVC, Oxfam, PROPAC, Redsan-CPLP, Rikolto, ROPPA, Schola Campesina, Terra Nuova, Solawi, Urgenci, WFP

Peer review by the Global Food Governance WG and the CSM Coordination Committee

Translation into French: Audrey Mouysset and Gregor Seither

Translation in Spanish: Rodrigo Gines Salguero and Antonio Morillo Castellanos

Graphic Design: Luca Tommasini

Cover: Sylvia Blanco


Published: October 2020

With the financial Support from:

The European Union

Swiss Confederation, represented by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, acting through Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

Sida

Agronomes et Vétérinaires sans Frontières (AVSF)

With thee support of

Oxfam
# VOICES FROM THE GROUND: from COVID-19 to radical transformation of our food systems

## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Messages</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Preamble-Understanding COVID-19 in the context of food systems transformation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconnected planetary, food system and human health</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market failure and the erosion of public policies</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layers of inequality</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The necessity and opportunity for food systems transformation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Voices from the ground</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Constituencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural and food workers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisherfolk</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Peoples</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasants and small-scale family farmers</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban food insecure and consumers</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landless</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoralists</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Regions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID 19 and protracted crises</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digitalization in food and agriculture</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Conclusions</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Lessons from our constituencies and regions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural inequalities determine COVID-19 impacts</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from governmental responses</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What worked effectively to tackle the pandemic, hunger, poverty?</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Ways forward towards more equitable and resilient food systems</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break from the neoliberal policy orientation</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need for human rights-based COVID-19 responses</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting Food Sovereignty into practice</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaffirm the primacy of the public sphere</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen food governance</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 A CFS-led Global Policy Response to COVID-19</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is a global policy response needed?</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is it needed now?</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the CFS the appropriate place to craft it?</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Messages

- The emergence and devastating impacts of COVID-19 are closely linked to the economic, social and environmental injustices provoked by neoliberal policies and a food system based on intensive, export-oriented agriculture production, global supply chains and market-led food provision, and corporate profit. The COVID-19 crisis cannot be fixed by emergency measures and stimulus packages that perpetuate the same injustices.

- Evidence collected on the ground around the world confirms that the pandemic brought existing inequalities and vulnerabilities into sharp relief and underscored the need for systemic change towards socially just food systems with agency, sustainability and stability at its heart, which CSM members characterise as agroecology and food sovereignty.

- The evidence also shows that few government responses to the pandemic aimed at the realization of human rights or addressed the needs of marginalized communities. They reflect biases against the centrality of peasant production, artisanal fisheries, small-scale herding, gathering/foraging, local food systems and food-agricultural labour in ensuring food security. The most affected peoples include rural and urban working classes, small-scale producers, landless peoples, Indigenous Peoples, women, peoples suffering from racism/discrimination, migrants, youth, refugees, peoples living in areas of war and conflict, and peoples in countries enduring economic blockades.

- Human rights and democracy have been eroded, with abuses of emergency executive powers; the use of force; enhanced surveillance and control of telecommunications, media and press; human and constitutional rights suspended and human rights defenders threatened; lockdowns, curfews, physical distancing and emergency measures harshly enforced through armed police and military, leading to arrests, violence and death.

- Communities’ responses have fostered values of solidarity, resilience, sustainability and human dignity. In some cases authorities have dialogued with people’s movements and taken their proposals on board. However, official policy, financial support and stimulus measures have mostly favoured corporations, large producers and global supply chains ensuring them the capital and work-force they need to keep operations running. This came at the expense of local food systems, creating hardships and deepening food insecurity. These two approaches cannot co-exist.

- The primacy of public policies over market and corporation-led responses is a precondition to support a radical transformation of food systems, realize the right to adequate food and put food sovereignty into practice.

- Putting the food sovereignty vision into practice in this crisis highlights the essential role that agroecology and territorial food systems, small-scale food producers and family farmers (mostly women) and workers play in feeding the majority of the population in a resilient way, in particular those most affected.

- More than any other international governance space, the CFS is the only forum which can ensure that all actors affected by the crisis can autonomously and legitimately organize to co-construct a global response, for which governments hold the primary responsibility.

“We cannot go back to normal. We need to democratize and socialize our food system. We need agroecology; we need to produce and consume locally and, at the same time, demand global climate justice. We cannot depend on agribusiness to feed ourselves. This is the time for the world to recognize the role of local food production and also the role of women in agriculture, since 60% of food production is carried out by women.”

*World March of Women, Africa*

We, as Youth, are the future custodians of our food systems and territories. In order to respond to COVID-19 and the other numerous ongoing crises, as well as to realize our human rights, we must radically transform our food systems, including reconfiguring whose rights are prioritized by our governance models and whose voices lead the way. Youth must be the cornerstone of any public policy on food security and nutrition, agriculture or the food system more broadly.

*(Youth declaration)*
Introduction

This report presents the experiences and concerns of millions of small-scale food producers, workers, consumers, women and youth represented in the organizations that participate in the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSM).1

As the COVID-19 pandemic swung from country to country in its deadly course this year, the members of the CSM Coordination Committee gathered virtually to discuss how it was affecting their communities and regions. From these discussions emerged the conviction that addressing the pandemic and its implications should be at the center of discourse and action not only in the CSM, but in the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) as a whole. It would be inconceivable for the CFS to fail to assume its responsibility in the face of the worst food-affecting phenomenon to strike humanity since the 2007-2008 crisis that sparked its reform. The World Food Programme (WFP) warns that COVID-19 could almost double the number of people suffering from acute hunger, pushing it to more than a quarter of a billion by the end of 2020.2

Accordingly, over the past months the CSM has advocated that the CFS exercise all of its agreed functions in addressing COVID-19, including that of policy convergence. The cogency of this position has become increasingly apparent as the weeks have passed, bringing evidence that COVID-19 is not a passing episode, but a manifestation and harbinger of deeply-rooted challenges, that globalized food supply systems are subject to multiple fragilities and generate deep and often fatal inequalities, and that a coordinated and coherent global response adhering to agreed principles and guidelines has never been more indispensable.

The present report is intended as a contribution to meeting this challenge. The methodology adopted for its preparation has been inclusive and participatory. All CSM Coordination Committee members were asked to reach out to the constituencies and regions they facilitate, responding to three questions: 1) What impacts is COVID-19 having on food systems, food security and the right to food? 2) How are communities, solidarity movements, constituencies reacting to these impacts? 3) What public policy proposals are emerging for building more equitable and resilient food systems? The Women’s and Youth Working Groups of the CSM have made dedicated contributions from the viewpoints of their constituencies elaborating, respectively, a women’s autonomous report and a youth declaration. The hundreds of inputs received have been synthesized into the present report and live links provided to longer documents. Video recordings have been inserted where possible in order to provide readers with the possibility of obtaining more detail and direct testimony. The diversity of style of the sections testifies to the fact that they have been authored by different groups in different places.

The report is structured as follows:

- The premise sets the context by identifying the multiple, interlinked preexisting structural problems which the pandemic has only exacerbated and rendered more visible.

- The main section presents evidence and analysis from the ground, organized according to the different constituencies and regions whose participation in the CFS is facilitated by the CSM. It illustrates the richness of evidence contributed by those most affected, which constitute important contributions, alongside of science-based evidence and macro-economic statistics, in considering policy choices. This section is not included in the shorter version of our report.

- The concluding section draws key themes and lessons from the evidence and demonstrates why it is incumbent on the CFS to play a leading role in developing a global policy response to COVID-19 in the direction of a radical transformation of our food system, as urged by the HLPE in its Global Narrative report.

1 The CSM is articulated into the 11 constituencies enumerated in the CFS reform document (smallholder family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, herders/pastoralists, landless, urban poor, agricultural and food workers, women, youth, consumers, Indigenous Peoples, and International NGOs) and 17 sub-regions.

1. Preamble-Understanding COVID-19 in the context of food systems transformation

The CSM stands in solidarity with all those whose lives have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The heavy toll on human life continues to be profoundly shocking. Several months after the start of the pandemic, it is clear that the emergence, spread and devastating impacts of the pandemic exacerbate existing and avertable systemic injustices. As grassroots movements we have witnessed that how we build, organize and govern our food systems determine and shape these injustices. Therefore, they determine the impacts of COVID-19 including who can and cannot meet their basic needs, who lives and who dies. The FAO is predicting an impending food crisis, but for many it is already a reality.

Interconnected planetary, food system and human health

Food systems transformation was imperative even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, with two billion facing food insecurity, increased distress migration, rising diet-related ill health, children across the world - even in the richest countries - one school meal away from food insecurity, workers paid poverty wages, countries extremely dependent on international markets to feed their populations, the continuing destruction of ecosystems by industrial food chains, gender violence and lack of access and control over natural resources for women. Deforestation from industrial farming, mining and infrastructure, factory farming of animals as well as the exploitation of wild species have created a 'perfect storm' for the spillover of diseases from wildlife to people. The pandemic has now brought all these existing inequalities and vulnerabilities into sharp relief – deepening their reach and combining them with new ones. It has underscored the need for systemic change towards socially just food systems with agency, sustainability and stability at its heart, which CSM members characterise as agroecology and food sovereignty.

Market failure and the erosion of public policies

Decades of neoliberal policies, reducing the role of the state and privileging a market-led food system, have led to the dismantling of public policies and regulation, prioritized commodity exports, food corporations' profits and global markets over small-scale producers, local food systems and food sovereignty. This market-driven paradigm has proven to be a critical pre-existing systemic weakness. It has resulted in decades of official neglect of the public realm integral to building robust health, welfare and food systems, environmental justice, gender justice and fundamental human rights, especially the Right to Food. Now its long supply chains have demonstrated considerable fragilities under COVID-19. COVID-19 is just the latest in a series of infectious diseases and crises linked to the industrial food system and it won't be the last.

Layers of inequality

Between 83 and 180 million more will be pushed into hunger because of the pandemic. The most affected peoples are those with no social protection, insecure livelihoods, and reduced access to and control over resources. These include rural and urban working classes, small-scale producers, landless peoples, Indigenous Peoples, women, peoples suffering from racism/discrimination, migrants, refugees, peoples living in areas of war and conflict, and peoples in countries enduring economic blockades. These groups face existing inequalities, exacerbated by neoliberalism, such as lack of access to healthcare, water and sanitation, increased co-morbidities and many other structural injustices that increase their vulnerability to COVID-19.

7 Coronavirus outbreak highlights need to address threats to ecosystems and wildlife UNEP 2020 https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/coronavirus-outbreak-highlights-need-address-threats-ecosystems-and-wildlife
The necessity and opportunity for food systems transformation

During the 2008 food price crisis, our movements - along with many scientists and academics - declared that we could not afford to go back to business as usual. Yet over a decade later it is clear that we have done just that, with damaging consequences. The global food system is even more fragile today with increased corporate concentration and control, financialization, destruction of ecosystems, markets that serve the interests of profit rather than food security. Food stocks are at record highs and eight of the biggest food and drink companies paid out over $18 billion to shareholders since January 2020. Yet the fixation with productivity or ‘sustainable intensification’ accompanied by technologically advanced free markets continues to reign in many multilateral spaces and national contexts, even as a response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Human, food system and planetary health are intimately connected as indigenous peoples and small-scale food producers know, and as the framework of food systems transformation towards agroecology and food sovereignty elaborates. For example, the diversity inherent in small scale agroecological systems has been shown to provide resilience to natural as well as socio-economic difficulties, healthy crops, animals, diets and ecosystems all of which are a counter to COVID-19. In this crisis territorial food systems, not structurally dependent on long supply chains, have been resilient. They have shown flexibility and innovation. In many cases the actors of these territorial systems have provided welfare and social protection that is the responsibility of the state. However, small-scale producers have been hit hard by COVID-19 and lockdowns and face huge challenges to continue feeding their communities in the future.

All the issues raised and evidence provided in this report come from grassroots experiences but their causes and impacts go far beyond national borders. Responses to this pandemic must not perpetuate historical and existing inequalities and power asymmetries within and between countries.

It is urgent for the CFS to take concerted, global, coordinated action to provide guidance, policy coherence and coordination for the indispensable transformation of our food systems and realization of the Right to Food. As we face the Covid-19 crisis we must aim for a ‘Just Recovery’ – one that puts justice, human rights and the need of the peoples, especially the most marginalized, and of the planet at its heart.

15 The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Chapter 5, 2019 https://ipbes.net/global-assessment
2. Voices from the ground

2.1 Constituencies

Agricultural and food workers

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the fragility of our food system, at the heart of which lies the absence of decent work for the vast majority of those around the world working in agriculture. Decent work deficits in agriculture and food industries have been worsened by COVID-19. The paradox is that those who feed the world were already least able to feed themselves and their families. The COVID pandemic has made this situation worse for many agricultural and food workers, increasing their levels of poverty, inequality and deepening their food insecurity. Border closures and emergency containment measures threaten the incomes and livelihoods of agricultural workers, their health and safety and those of their family members. Workers living and working on plantations, on farms of all sizes, in orchards, greenhouses and packing stations risk exclusion from necessary public health and social security measures. Women, casual, self-employed and migrant workers are at high risk. While wage protection and income support are provided in many G20 and OECD countries, working people in Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Americas have lost jobs and incomes and could face widespread famine.

Essential workers treated as expendable

There is a disconnect between how low-wage workers are being described and what they’re experiencing on the ground. During the pandemic, government authorities have qualified agricultural and food workers as “essential workers”, meaning they had to continue to work in conditions where they are being treated as expendable since employers often failed to provide adequate protective measures. The work they do is essential; their health and lives, it seems, are not. This is true of workers in food supply chains who help feed the world - but who, paradoxically, are often least able to feed themselves as their wages or income are insufficient to ensure food security by obtaining sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life. Food factories everywhere remain open and are working around the clock to maintain supply. Farms and plantations continue to supply perishable food despite difficulties, for example, in harvesting fresh produce such as fruit and vegetables due to a shortage of labour - often migrant workers, not receiving the most basic health and safety measures, still risking their lives without basic health and safety protection or paid quarantine or leave. Many workers are being infected and are dying as a result. Forcing vulnerable workers with little choice but to endure conditions that put them at risk, including by dismantling previously estab-

lished labour rights, can constitute a form of forced labour, according to the ILO. In over half of the 95 countries surveyed by ITUC, it was reported that over the past few months their government had introduced restrictions to human and labour rights under the cover of their response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Profits before health**

The risk is even higher in food and agricultural industries, due to systemic weaknesses. Only 5% of the workers in agriculture have any access to a labour inspection system or legal protection of their health and safety rights. Trade union rights are often restricted or repressed while few agricultural workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements. COVID-19 outbreaks at meat processing plants around the world provide the best illustration of the high risks and the price paid by meat workers in ensuring food supplies to markets, shops, supermarkets, canteens, restaurants, cafes and bars. Outbreaks in meatpacking plants are clearly a worldwide phenomenon. The USA has been hardest hit but other countries with highly consolidated meat supply chains with fewer but larger plants of thousands workers - Germany, Ireland, Brazil, Spain, France, Poland, Belgium, Australia, Canada and the UK - have also had serious outbreaks. Tens of thousands of workers in meat plants have caught the disease due to a combination of factors - poor employment practices, often predominantly of migrant workers, poor and crowded working conditions and health and safety conditions, and in some cases, poor living quarters. Corporations are seeking to run assembly lines as fast as possible, at the cost of health and safety of workers. The global meat processing industry is controlled by very few, large companies with significant power over workers and governments. COVID-19 has put a spotlight on how companies are using their political clout to influence governments. In many cases governments are giving free rein to companies to consolidate their position or to take insufficient action to address the massive spread of the virus in the sector.

**Shifting costs down the supply line**

While huge profits are made and dividends are paid to shareholders, the pandemic is used to freeze wages and social protection benefits. In Colombia many banana workers have had to undergo mandatory quarantine. When they test positive for the new coronavirus, workers in the sector who have lost working days are taken care of by the social security (the Health Promotion Entity, EPS) and receive payment for their disability, but when they test negative they lose their wages. In India, hundreds of tea plantation workers, many of them women, have gone unpaid as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown. At the same time, some of the largest Indian tea companies have boosted their profits (e.g. Tata Tea), or have been able to maintain profit margins by cutting costs (e.g. Unilever Hindustan). In West Africa, cocoa farmers are feeling the impacts of COVID-19 as the decline in global demand for cocoa is channelled to farmers through buyers’ global supply chains in the form of lower prices. Child labour on cocoa farms is also on the rise due to the economic downturn impacting cocoa farmers and the lower availability of adult labour due to lockdowns. In Thailand, workers in global seafood supply chains have been left alone to deal with the impacts of COVID-19, including obtaining protective gear and declining wages.
**Increased gender inequalities**

Women are at the frontline of this pandemic. Women who are already overrepresented in precarious, casual and low paid work, are the first to be impacted by the huge economic and social crisis. They constitute up to 66.5% of the agricultural workforce in low income countries. They form 70% of workers in the health and social care sector and are the vast majority of the cashiers in supermarkets and canteens, restaurants and hotels. Domestic workers in affected countries have seen their workload increase without overtime pay. Others have been brutally dismissed with no compensation. Many female migrant workers, such as domestic workers, were impacted by travel restrictions. But due to entrenched gender inequalities all around the world, women are under increased pressure to ensure health care needs, supervise home schooling, feed their families, leading many to resign from work. Lockdowns exposes more women to domestic violence either because they already have a violent partner or because partners may become violent as a result of the added stresses of financial penury. These increasing inequalities will not be overcome if women have their voices heard in decision making bodies, including those relating to public health (including COVID-19) and occupational health and safety.

**Responses from the ground**

In addition to being sick or unable to work, many workers face the risk of losing their wages. Workers’ organizations all over are seeking to ensure that workers’ rights are respected. In some countries, trade unions contributed to defining appropriate measures to ensure that protect lives, jobs and incomes introduced and ensuring people’s health are a priority. Together with public authorities and employers, workers had adopted amid Covid-19 Occupational Safety, Health and Environment regulation, that are implemented at the company level; constant dialogue with the municipal governments and health authorities are held, including on monitoring all the plants making sure that adequate labour inspections can continue in safe circumstances. In countries like Canada, trade unions had to call the public to tell their government that taxpayer money to corporations must first guarantee the health and safety of workers – and food workers must have a say in determining the conditions of their own health and safety. Other calls urged States and businesses to work with labour unions and other worker representatives to help ensure necessary safeguards are in place. The also urged the ILO governing body to acknowledge the right to safe and healthy work without further delay, along with other internationally recognized human rights.26

Movements engaged in various ways to pro-

---

tect human rights and its principles of human dignity and non-discrimination at local levels, sometimes with small steps but immense expressions of solidarity: manufacturing masks and distributing them to frontline workers, supporting jobless migrant workers with food, transport or shelter, or ensuring entitlements to food aid. In some locations hotels are used as quarantine facilities and as temporary housing for at-risk people. Where lockdown is in place and movement restricted, workers movements reached out through massive use of social media platforms and press media including print and televised messages. These messages also encouraged members to speak out and report any cases of domestic and gender-based violence, to seek support from the security organs and the union leaders and to provide mechanisms of protecting our members from being affected by domestic violence.

Policy demands
Recognizing food and agricultural workers as essential/critical workers for food security needs to go hand-in-hand with adopting and implementing a Labour and human rights-based approach. This has to be based on existing ILO standards and guidance, FAO/WHO recommendations for food business, and CFS/OECD/FAO guidance for responsible agricultural supply chains. They include the international core labour standards of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, including for migrant workers, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

The right to direct employment. The voluntary approach is not working to control COVID-19 pandemic. There is a need for laws and their enforcement. Agriculture and food workers must be directly employed by employers. The provision of labour through labour contracting and sub-contracting arrangements and practices, and labour supply agents must be stopped. This is essential to provide equal rights to migrant workers.

The right to decent health and safety conditions in workplaces. The provision by employers of improved health and safety conditions and practices against COVID-19 in food and agricultural workplaces. Employers must meet their responsibilities to improve and maintain decent health and safety conditions in workplaces. All food and agricultural workplaces need a plan on how to deal with Covid-19.

The right to be paid a living wage. Ensure decent wages, benefits and working conditions, that are at least adequate to satisfy the basic needs of workers and their families, and strive to improve working conditions. (OECD/FAO Guidance)

The right to social protection. Ensure that the implementation of the CFS social protection recommendations, and the ILO social protection floors recommendation and support for a global fund for universal social protection.

The right to paid sick leave if it is necessary for workers to isolate - otherwise they will be under pressure to turn up for work even if sick and a source of infection for COVID-19.

The right to regular hours of work and avoidance of excessive overtime.

Special attention must be paid to ensuring women workers’ rights: their right to income protection and social security, maternity protection, post-natal care, proper protective equipment and protection from sexual harassment.
The right of all migrant workers. Enforce fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions and protect all migrant workers against all forms of exploitation and abuse in order to guarantee decent work[^27], recognizing the rights of undocumented migrant workers and action taken to eliminate trafficking in migrant workers while at the same time ensuring the protection of their human rights, as agreed in the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers.[^28]

**Labour Inspection.** Governments should seek to regularly monitor and enforce compliance with the above measures through properly resourced and trained labour inspectors.

**Better cooperation and coordination between UN agencies.** The FAO, ILO and WHO, the UN agencies responsible for food, employment conditions and health, must work together to ensure essential workers have decent working conditions. The FAO, ILO and WHO must include trade unions in the development and implementation of global guidelines to ensure global food security.


---

**ILO instruments and tools in agriculture:**
- The Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129)
- The Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 11)
- The Plantations Convention, 1958 (No. 110)
- The Rural Workers’ Organizations Convention, 1975 (No. 141)
- The Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184)
- The Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)

The Code of practice on safety and health in agriculture (2011)

---

**Fisherfolk**

This contribution is built on contributions of fisherfolks from the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and World Forum of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers (WFF), country and regional contributions, the International Collective in Support of Fish Workers, researchers[^29], as well as different webinars and exchanges that focused on the critical role of small scale fisheries.

**Impacts**

The lockdown of small-scale fishing and local markets affects the millions of women and men directly involved in small-scale fisheries (from local fishing communities to those involved in fishing, processing and marketing of fish) and the millions of people who depend on fish as a healthy and affordable protein all over the world.

Indiscriminate lockdowns on fishing activities in different countries demonstrate a preexist-
ing tendency to underplay the role of fish in food systems. It took time and pressure from fisherfolks and civil society to lift total close down of fisheries (contrary to farming activities) as they were not recognized as vital to national food supply (e.g. Namibia, India, South Africa).

Where fishing is deemed an essential service, social distancing measures have precluded many small-scale fishers from going fishing due to vessel size or closing down of fish landing centers and local fish markets. Knock-on economic effects from market disruptions have further impacted small-scale fishers’ ability to pursue their livelihoods because of reduced demand and attendant collapse of prices, with drastically reduced fishing activity, and closed factories or operating at reduced capacity (e.g. Peru, Philippines, Europe). Even critical inputs like ice or access to cold storage are not available in many areas (e.g. Lake Victoria, India). In Fiji, the temporary closure of interisland ferry transport has cut off access for some to urban and semi-urban markets. So, the fishermen do not have an incentive to fish. When there is the possibility to do limited fishing and let the fisherwomen undertake fish vending in nearby areas, even this option is difficult, given the stigma that the fish vending women may get infected and bring the disease to their villages.

In China, given the “virus stigma” on animals, there is a heavy scrutiny of wet markets where fresh fish is often sold along with other live animals and animal products. Lockdown of local markets have caused an almost complete halt for small-scale fishing activities in Honduras, Ecuador, Turkey, South Africa, Senegal, Sri Lanka and the Gambia. In other countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Spain, France and Maldives, small-scale fishers can continue to operate but their income is seriously restricted by the lack of customers, competition from the industrial fleets and/or a fall in prices.

Specific groups are particularly hit. Women comprise 80–90% of the post-harvest sector, and work in close proximity in processing and retail facilities, putting them at higher risk for COVID-19. In Malaysia, women in the tens of thousands have lost their livelihoods as processing and marketing has come to a complete halt. In Thailand, where fishers have started to sell their catches directly to customers through digital systems as a response to the social distancing measures, women are cut off from processing and selling activities. In South Africa, women who have part time work in other sectors (e.g. tourism) have been sent home without any compensation. In Sri Lanka, women are suffering from increased domestic violence, food insecurity and lack of access to medicine and health services. In processing plants worldwide, women tend to occupy temporary and lower-paid positions, do not have access to social protections after losing their jobs, are more likely to be laid off, and cannot defend their labor rights.

Migrant fishers face combined stress from lost income, inability to support families, shortage of basic necessities and exclusion from government relief schemes. Reports from India 31

---

indicate many migrants are stranded on vessels or in harbors, unable to return home, living in cramped living conditions without adequate water or food.

The means to enforce social distancing and curfews across the world is in many places going hand in hand with increased state violence. The military ‘safeguarding’, banning of trade at fish markets in Sri Lanka, police violence in South Africa where access to the shoreline was forbidden, despite authorization of national and provincial authorities and the army’s blockage of food or other items in and out of the Lake Turkana region in Northern Kenya are just a few cases illustrating the brutal and authoritarian measures taken by many governments in the world. In Indonesia the opposition to sand mining project by fisherfolks is repressed.

Large scale offshore freezing vessels, whose catches go straight into cold storage and those involved in fishmeal fisheries can continue their activities. There are also reports in Indonesia or Argentina of heightened illegal fishing activity by foreign vessels, as government priorities have shifted toward pandemic control, potentially with direct impacts on fish stocks of small-scale fisheries. Furthermore, the generally informal character of the small-scale fishing sector renders them already particularly vulnerable to economic, environmental, climatic changes with low political recognition. As relief mechanisms are geared towards the formalized economy and the industrialized food system, their marginalization and the power imbalances between the industrialized food system on the one hand and small-scale food producers on the other is further deepened.

How did communities respond?
There are numerous examples of fisherfolks contributing to address food insecure populations in their communities. In Oaxaca, Mexico, local fishers are contributing their time and boats to provide 50–60 tons per week of free seafood for their communities. In Kwa-zulu-Natal, South Africa, they organized themselves to provide 100 parcels of food to the most needed. In Indigenous communities on the British Columbia coast, people are turning to the sea and land for food for themselves and to share. In Hawaii, the local food movement has grown substantially, with fishers helping to supply vulnerable populations (elders) and food banks to bolster local food security. And strong existing social networks in the Pacific Islands have facilitated food sharing since the onset of COVID-19. Worldwide, local food networks and community-supported fisheries (CSFs) have emerged to fill some of the gaps left by COVID-19 related market disruptions. As demand for direct delivery to households is increasing, SSF have been able to adapt their distribution models to keep their production stable, creating and strengthening direct connections with local household consumers. In Maine, the CSF ‘Local Catch Network’ has seen an uptick in membership and sales, and consumers can consult a public registry of local fishers from whom they can buy seafood.

32 https://remezcla.com/culture/giving-during-coronavirus-oaxaca-fisherman/
directly. Furthermore, in Sri Lanka fisher cooperatives step-up efforts to use the lock-down to rebuild local supply chains as imports have fallen and private traders’ mobility is curbed.

Strong collective action within and across small-scale fishing communities has manifested in several ways. Fishers have acted collectively to reassert their rights to food, livelihoods, or safe working conditions, pushing back against government response to COVID-19, and have leveraged relationships and collaborations with their government counterparts to continue fishing. For example, following a week of negotiations with the Department of Fisheries, the South African Small-scale Fisheries Collective successfully advocated for migratory small-scale fishing activity to resume amidst lock-down measures. In Newfoundland, Canada, the Fish, Food, and Allied Workers Union facilitated a blockade to divert out-of-province crab from entering the local processing plant, until safe working conditions were guaranteed and fair prices negotiated. And the Fijian Government has recognized the importance of SSF to local food security, allowing the sector to fish during curfew hours.

Policy demands

Fisherfolks call for a radical shift in policy response to address the underlying causes. One the one hand, governments must stop extending political and economic favors and pouring money on the large-scale industrialized food system. On the other, governments should direct support towards small-scale fishers (and other small-scale food producers) and their localized food systems, building on the principles of food sovereignty.

They call on governments to:

- value food providers and support the localized food system that provides healthy and nutritious food for masses of peoples at affordable prices.

- provide support to improve the quality of products and working conditions, including improvement of sanitary and health conditions in the small-scale fisheries sector.

- work with fisher organizations to strengthen the local democratic control over land and water resources and to find appropriate measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

- guarantee access to healthy and nutritious food for everyone, especially isolated and marginalized communities and those who are disproportionately affected by the current crisis such as small-scale fisherfolks and their families.

The movements of fisherfolks reminded governments about the International Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries, endorsed by the FAO Committee on Fisheries in 2014 – with emphasis on the states’ responsibility to promote the human rights based approach and ensure participation of fisher organizations in decision making to strengthen the local democratic control over land and water resources and to find appropriate measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus. In this acute health, social, environmental and economic crisis, small-scale food producers are not only central to food production but also must be at the center in policy- and decision-making.

The SSF Guidelines contain guidance on the socioeconomic situation of workers in the fishing sector industry and their communities. States must promote the protection of workers in the artisanal fishing sector. States should support the establishment of services and access to services such as savings, credit and insurance systems, paying particular attention to guaranteeing women’s access to these services. The SSF Guidelines recognize that post-harvest activities as well as other value-chain activities are essential elements of sustainable artisanal fisheries, but it is important that all parties promote improvements that make it easier for women to participate in post-harvest activities.

They also reminded them the Work in Fishing Convention (No. 188), adopted in 2007 at the level of the International Labor Organization (ILO), aiming to “ensure” that fishermen benefit from “decent conditions” for working on board fishing vessels with regard to minimum requirements for work on board, conditions of service, accommodation and food, protection of safety and occupational health, and medical care and social security. A human rights perspective for all fisherfolks and workers is essential in building sustainable and resilient fisheries.

33 From min 15.00 onwards
Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples currently represent around 476 million people in the world, or 6.2% of the world’s population, but at the same time they constitute 15% of the people living in extreme poverty globally.34

The SARS-CoV2 pandemic that causes the COVID-19 disease deepens the situation of vulnerability of Indigenous Peoples and communities. In addition, there are no data disaggregated by indigenous identity able to show the specific level of infection that Indigenous Peoples suffer in the face of this pandemic.

The Coronavirus 19 deepens many of the pre-existing structural problems such as lack of basic infrastructure: water, electricity, paved roads. At the same time - the effects on Indigenous Peoples’ health that they already suffer due to pollution by uranium, coal from the mines in their territory and fracking35 are made even more visible and their impacts are exacerbated in terms of injustice, discrimination, inequalities, violations of the right to food and nutrition, the right to health and other human rights. Different studies also indicate that the loss of biodiversity and habitats where many Indigenous Peoples live generate the conditions for the development of infectious diseases such as the current COVID-19.36

This has been stated by representatives of international organizations, such as the president of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, saying that “our communities are almost three times more likely to live in extreme poverty, and therefore are more prone to infectious diseases. Many indigenous communities already suffer from malnutrition and immunosuppressive conditions, which can increase the susceptibility to infectious diseases”.37

The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples maintains that “indigenous peoples are over-represented among the poor and suffer higher rates of malnutrition, coupled with the effects of environmental pollution and, in many cases, lack of access to adequate health care services as a result, many have lowered immune systems, respiratory conditions and other health problems, making them particularly vulnerable to the spread of disease.”38

The second report of the Regional Indigenous Platform against COVID-19 (PIR-ALC) of Latin America and the Caribbean, together with the International Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC), maintains that “the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples could reach extremely critical levels, both in terms of the amount of loss of life and the magnitude of the damage to the way of life and resilience of their communities.”39

Some indigenous youth gave us their testimony: “the pandemic has revealed inequalities, discrimination, sectorization, class division and fundamentalisms” of dominant societies towards indigenous peoples.” Likewise, “acts of criminalization are seen when they defend their rights. That is also a pandemic”.40 In some countries “illegal health measures are used on the pretext of containing the virus.” Furthermore, “there is a danger that repressive neo-colonial regimes will whip us”41, implying that they would be repressed.

“In the WHO nothing about Indigenous Peoples is mentioned. The health of Indigenous Peoples is hardly or ever brought to atten-

34 Major Group of Indigenous Peoples, Overview of Indigenous Peoples, 2020
35 Yazzie, Janene, from the Diné-Navajo people, United States, in CITI Webinar, 08-21-2020. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7F95jrwyt7Q, Minute 55´: 36
40 Vega, Jessica, young indigenous leader from Oaxaca, vice president of the Global Caucus of Indigenous Youth, CITI Webinar, 06-12-2020. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xADKDA0audk, Minute 15: 35 “--24: 48
41 Kiburo, , Karson young indigenous Kenyan Seminar Web d CITI, 06.12.2020. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xADKDA0audk, Minute 25: 15 “--33: 40
VOICES FROM THE GROUND: from COVID-19 to radical transformation of our food systems

The foregoing is reinforced by the words of of the elder Francois Paulette from the Northern Territory: after the pandemic and everything that is happening, according to the prophecies, people will go North to seek shelter, water and food. People will return to earth and seek the traditional way of life. In earlier times, the colonizers were looking for oil and gold, now they will come to look for water and food. This is the prophecy of the peoples.

Most Indigenous Peoples depend for their subsistence on agricultural production, small-scale fishing, herding, and gathering. All of these activities have been affected by the restriction measures that have had to be adopted, which entail the closure of local and regional markets and the impossibility of marketing products and obtaining income to secure their food sustenance. This affects their right to adequate food and is generating a great food crisis, which will grow as the pandemic spreads from urban to rural and indigenous areas. Another set of problems that are expanding the pandemic to indigenous territories is “the return of migrant workers to their homes, the maintenance or reopening of formal and informal commercial circuits, the mobility between cities (departments and provinces), the penetration into indigenous territories of people dedicated to extractive exploitation of natural resources.”

On the other hand, one of the measures recommended by international health agencies and promoted by governments to prevent disease is washing hands with soap and clean water, but this in many cases, is not possible due to lack of access to this vital fluid and to hygiene products; to the contamination of their sources of healthy water by polluting industries; the dispossession of their territories and springs; the policies of industrial food production that degrade their soils and lead to the loss of biodiversity in their territories.

Faced with this situation, Indigenous Peoples have generated their own sanitary control initiatives, through ancestral or current practices. They have generated their own hygiene and disinfection materials or have been able to obtain support from government programs. At the same time, they have valued the use of their traditional knowledge in traditional medicine, in the strengthening of their traditional food systems and indigenous languages and in the mechanisms of solidarity and traditional reciprocity.

For example: “The Achuar nationality has blocked access of tourists to their territory. The two organizations Conai and Confeniae intend to maintain the quarantine of the towns and nationalities with measures of social isolation until the end of May, providing guards but also locally authorizing fairs, with preventive measures, to allow the survival of food. These measures are followed by the Waorani, Sionas, Kichwa, Cofanes, Shuar, Achuar, Sapara, Andwa and Shiwar from Ecuador.”

Karson Kiburo, a young indigenous person from Kenya, states that they are dealing with this pandemic by “talking with the elderly, to use their traditional knowledge.” They also promote actions that seek to emphasize “healthy and safe food systems.”

Jake Waledo, a young woman from the Na-
vajo-Diné-Hopi people of New Mexico, United States, described how, in the face of the pandemic, young people organized voluntarily “as volunteers of the support team to face COVID-19”. He proposed as an unavoidable action, “to grow our own food in order to have food sovereignty.” Jake Waledo raised the need to “rethink the power of the government and fight for decolonization.”

Public Policy Proposals
In the long struggle of Indigenous Peoples, they have achieved the recognition of their fundamental rights, in particular their right to self-determination, to food, nutrition, their territories and natural assets, their cultural heritage, and a healthy environment, as well as the right to health. Among others tools, they have established international legal instruments such as The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ILO Convention 169, the Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and other people who live in rural areas, the Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests; the Voluntary Guidelines on small-scale fisheries.

These legal instruments, plus the policy recommendations adopted by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), must be taken into account, so that this international body, the CFS, approves the policy recommendations to the States for due attention to the Right to Food and health of Indigenous Peoples that have been affected by the pandemic.

The actions and policies promoted by indigenous peoples during the pandemic should be respected and, where appropriate, converted into public policies by the States.

The production systems of small-scale food producers and Indigenous Peoples should be strengthened, their forms of organization and feeding be recognized, such as the exchange of products through barter.

Identify the ethnic origin of people and groups under risk or affected by the pandemic, as well as specific culturally relevant health measures and actions.

Disseminate information, prevention and health measures in Indigenous Languages.

Restore traditional food systems in indigenous communities.

Guarantee comprehensive and intercultural care through consultation and dialogue processes.

The CFS, as a multilateral organism of the United Nations with a specific mandate to elaborate food policies at the global level, must take up these reflections, recommendations and proposals, to approve normative and preventive measures of urgent policies to address the food crisis that is being generated in indigenous territories as a consequence of the pandemic.

The future after the pandemic
Looking towards the future, Indigenous Peoples are clear about their path. In the testimonies we point out what we must do:

- continue to promote food sovereignty, traditional sovereignty, guarantee decent housing, revive our forms of traditional health aid, promote actions to protect the elderly possessors of traditional knowledge.
- Promote an agenda for the future, with an anti-colonial approach and accountability.
- We must preserve community practices, traditional practices. Make alliances with other sectors that share our indigenous vision and that comply with the instruments of rights of Indigenous Peoples. Promote the planting of our food in our homes and territories.

Decide on our ways of life, rescuing the im-

47 Waledo, Jake, Navajo-Diné-Hopi Indian youth, New Mexico, USA, CITI Webinar, 06-12-2020. Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xADKDA0audk, minute 45:11 to 52:19.

48 These last three paragraphs are a synthesis of the presentations by indigenous brothers and sisters during the CITI Webinar on August 28, 2020. CITI Webinar, The Future After COVID-19. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7F9qjrvyt7Q.
mense value of tradition and assuming the possibilities of the future decided in an autonomous way; put into practice what we are saying.

That the elders keep teaching the young how to sustain gratitude ceremonies, how to maintain the fire, even when things are not as we wish. That we, Indigenous Peoples, be able to put aside Western thinking that wants to control everything.

Peasants and small-scale family farmers

This section is drawn from front-line reporting by small-scale family farmer/peasant organizations that are members of the CSM, totalling millions of food producers around the world: La Via Campesina (LVC, and its member European Coordination Via Campesina - ECVC), Network of Peasant and Agricultural Producer Organizations of West Africa (ROPPA, and its member Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux du Sénégal - CNCR), Network of Peasant Organizations of Central Africa (PROPAC) Confederacion de Organizaciones de Productores Familiares del Mercosur Ampliado (COPROFAM), Asian Farmers Association (AFA), Intercontinental Network of Organic Farmers Organizations (INOFO), International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movement (FIMARC), Schola Campesina. Live links are provided in the text to detailed reports and video recordings.

The context in which COVID 19 has appeared

Existing fragilities revealed

Peasant/small-scale family farmer organizations emphasize that the pandemic has merely revealed the pre-existing unsustainability of the dominant food system and the inequalities that it reproduces (COPROFAM). COVID has intensified the existing vulnerabilities and inadequacies of the global food system controlled by big companies. The United Nations reported that about 130 million more people would go hungry in 2020. Despite this, the accumulation of wealth by those at the top increased during this pandemic and big companies have paid out billions of dollars to shareholders since January (LVC). The capacity of the large food distribution sector and other multinationals to guarantee and supply sufficient quantities of fresh food to consumers depends on many fragile factors which, as we have seen with the COVID-19 outbreak, are largely out of their control, precisely because of the number of links in the food supply chain between production and consumption (ECVC).

Inadequate public policies and control

The neoliberal globalization of agricultural markets leads to a loss of public control over food systems and a heavy dependence on imports and a very small number of multinational companies (ECVC). The pandemic has revealed with greater force the limitations of government policies. Many governments invested a lot of money to block the pandemic and its impacts, but these impacts were caused essentially by the existing inequalities and the fact that public and social policies had been weakened by these same governments (COPROFAM). We have the impression that the authorities are playing leap-frog, jumping from one crisis to another without a systemic and holistic reflection to address these questions in a structural manner (ROPPA).

‘Our countries’ economies are highly extroverted, dependent on the outside world. Our agricultural policies are shaped by the international institutions, donors and multinational agrifood corporations. We see reports prepared by highly paid consultants who have never lived in a village. They are considered to be the experts while we, who live on the ground, are hardly listened to.’


Food import dependent countries are the most affected but...

The crisis has demonstrated that increased liberalisation of trade goes hand in hand with increased vulnerability and shocks for food importing countries. The countries which import most of their food stocks have been the worst affected by the closing of the frontiers (CO-
PROFAM). And yet the implications of this clear lesson are not being drawn. On the contrary, in this period many countries (e.g. Mexico, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Mercosur) are further opening up their economies to attract foreign investments through free trade agreements (LVC 1).

**Negative impacts of COVID 19 and government measures on peasants/small-scale family farmers**

**Violence, militarisation and authoritarian policy change**
The lockdown restrictions are disproportionately enforced, affecting the most the peasants and their communities, the poor and the working class (LVC 1). The state has taken advantage of the humanitarian disgrace to exercise more authoritarian control over the population (LVC, 2). We are witnessing an increase in cases of expropriation of land and water resources, assassination of social leaders, as well as domestic violence against women (COPROFAM). In Chile the state security apparatus has been detaining, beating and harassing the volunteers of community-led soup kitchens feeding the hungry (LVC 1). Armed law enforcers are storming the slums in the capital city of Uganda to enforce social distancing (INOFO). The pandemic is being used as an opportunity to push neoliberal, pro-corporate reforms in countries in all regions. Laws related to agriculture and land are being relaxed (LVC 1, COPROFAM).

**Inadequate social protection coverage**
In some countries food baskets are being distributed in urban areas but don’t reach the rural population (INOFO). We see widespread cases of organized corruption in the distribution of food and medicine (COPROFAM). This situation is worsened by the closure of the schools and the interruption of the school feeding programmes (COPROFAM, CNCR).

**Social tensions and conflict**
Social tensions are being provoked in situations in which the population reacts against what are perceived as punitive measures put in place by the authorities. The fact that pastoralists are not allowed to follow their normal seasonal movements is re-igniting conflicts with agriculturalists that had been overcome in the past years (CNCR). COVID 19’s further exacerbation of existing unaddressed crises and problems is pushing more young people towards desperate choices of migration or terrorism (ROPPA 2).

**Markets and incomes**
Impacts of government measures on markets and distribution are the biggest issue for family farmers (COPROFAM). The closure of territorial markets (farmers, weekly and village markets etc.) while keeping supermarkets open has had disastrous effects on small-scale producers’ livelihoods and is not justified by the realities of safety requirements (LVC 2, CNCR, AFA, INOFO, PROPAC). In Nepal farmers cannot sell their products due to lack of transport. Livestock growers need to collect fodder for their cattle, otherwise they will die. In addition, the price of rice and other essentials have hiked up (AFA). The negative impacts on the taxes collected by the local authorities creates a vicious circle in terms of reduced investments in the infrastructures and services these markets need. Women’s processing and sales activities have suffered particularly (CNCR). Public procurement schemes are being captured by corporations and retail chains (COPROFAM), while food baskets don’t always include local products (CNCR). The interruption of remittances has affected the many families who count on contributions from members who have migrated (LVC 1). The most vulnerable are those who depend on daily earnings (INOFO). Debt is a serious issue for all family farmers who are exhausting their stock and can’t make it to the next harvest (CNCR ROPPA 2). In Sri Lanka LVC member MONLAR reports that many rural

---

51 This is corroborated by the evidence contributed by ILRI and others at the CFS webinar on ‘Resilient Food Supply Chains and Workers’ Health during COVID19’ (21 July 2020).
people are committing suicide due to failure to repay microfinance loans. (LVC 1)
Where government support programmes for farmers exist the criteria for selecting the beneficiaries often exclude those most in need. In Japan family farms received less support than corporate farms (LVC 1)

The next season?
Many family farmers and peasants have expressed concern about how to get ready for the agricultural season under covid conditions. (ROPPA 2, CNCR, AFA). This problem is worsened in situations in which producers depend on 'improved' imported seeds rather than producing their own (CNCR).

Peasant/small-scale family farmer responses

Solidarity
Around the world peasant family farmers have been in the forefront of putting in place solidarity initiatives and mechanisms for vulnerable people and communities. Peasant organisations have organized communication campaigns to disseminate information on how to prevent contagion, often in collaboration with public authorities and medical personnel, calling for measures to protect agricultural and food workers, and denouncing violence against leaders and peoples (ROPPA 1, LVC 1, LVC 2). POs are also distributing food parcels, seeds and protective materials in their own countries, and even in other regions in south-south and north-south solidarity (AFA, LVC 1). In Palestine the Union of Agricultural Work Committees has assisted some 9,350 families with 1,490 hygiene kits, 358,000 vegetable seedlings, and 855 food parcels. People-led local knowledge-sharing and seed exchange mechanisms already being practiced before the pandemic started have been useful during the crisis (FIMARC).

Innovation, networking and alliances
As always, peasant family farming is proving to be a fertile terrain for innovation to address challenges in a rapidly changing situation. Relations have been built with consumers in a framework of social and solidarity economy. Alliances have been constructed with intermediate actors to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas. Direct selling has developed using on-line technologies, but it should be remembered that the most vulnerable are those that are least likely to have access to these technologies. Producers organizations have also built alliances with other civil society networks and with research institutes. (COPROFAM, ROPPA 2, CNCR, LVC 1, INOFO, AFA). In some cases, retail chains are expressing interest in obtaining local fresh produce to replace the products they previously imported, exposing the weakness of import-dependent value chains (INOFO). In some cases peasant organizations have reported increased consumer awareness about the value of fresh healthy produce as a result of the pandemic (INOFO), but this is by no means universal, and in some situations a large increase in sale of fast foods and processes foods has been noted (COPROFAM).

Sharing and strategizing
There has been a veritable explosion of studies, webinars and virtual seminars to share experience, discuss issues affecting peasant organizations and other social movements, and to build strategies and solidarity. (LVC 1, PROPAC, AFA). The region-wide Monitoring and Action Committee set up by ROPPA and other West African producer and civil society networks is a structured example of this kind of initiative (ROPPA 2).

Dialogue with authorities
Around the world peasant family farmers have developed dialogue with authorities, alone or in alliances with other social actors. In some cases the proposals they have put forward to
address immediate issues, like the closure of local markets, have been acted on by the authorities (CNCR) but this is far from universal. On the contrary, peasant family farmers, like other vulnerable social actors, often feel they are invisibilized. Municipalities and other local authorities are felt to be the most accessible and the most aware of real problems on the ground (COPROFAM, CNCR).

Emerging policy proposals and conclusions

Peasant/small-scale family farmers have formulated detailed proposals to help meet the immediate and short-term problems caused by the pandemic and the lock-down measures. As indicated above, in a number of countries they have advocated for them with success in dialogue with local and national authorities. Their longer-term proposals are a reaffirmation of the food sovereignty policy platforms that pre-existed the pandemic, supporting a radical transformation of food systems in the direction of greater equity and sustainability and adequate public social policies and protection mechanisms for the vulnerable. Key elements of these platforms include promotion of domestic food production for domestic consumption; support for territorial markets with shorter supply chains and more effective links between rural and urban areas; promotion of agroecology; regulation of prices in favor of producers rather than intermediaries; producers’ access to and control over natural resources including land, water and seeds; support for family farmer and women’s association and direct financing to their organizations; appropriate financial measures including lower interest rates on credit, primacy of public policies – formulated with the participation of small-scale producers and other social actors - over private sector investments and PPPs. Fighting for women’s rights and against gender violence is a goal that engages all (COPROFAM, CNCR, ROPPA, AFA, LVC 1, LVC 2, Schola Campesina).

At the global level small-scale family farmers and peasants call for a strengthening of international cooperation in the post-covid scenario, and of the articulation between global, regional and national dialogue spaces. The methodology for applying and monitoring global policy outcomes needs to be improved. Links with the UNDFF, UNDROP and CFS policy outcomes are particularly important. Food governance has to be removed from the purview of the WTO and bilateral trade agreements and a more decisive role should be given to the CFS, where family farmers have a voice (COPROFAM, LVC 1, Schola Campesina).

Some last words:

From an Italian member of LVC: ‘When all of this comes to an end i twill not be the ‘injections of liquidity’ that will determin the recovery, but the ability, willingness, resis-
tance and productive autonomy of peasants, artisans, small and medium-sized companies operating locally, the real backbone of the national economy. But only if they have not been definitively annihilated in the meantime.’ ARI. http://assorurale.it/comunicato_stampa_su_misure_governative_covid-19.html.

From FAO: ‘Direct interventions targeting family farmers can bring sustainable benefits to rural econom
ies...and enable comprehensive and long-
Urban food insecure and consumers

Impacts
The incidence of COVID-19 infection is higher in cities than elsewhere. Socio-territorial inequalities in urban areas contribute significantly to inequities in access to adequate food. Access to food has been impacted negatively. Urban and peri-urban agriculture programs have become more fragile. Due to social distancing, public services have been interrupted and the planting sites, including school gardens, are largely no longer maintained. Open and public markets are closed in many locations. Many cities do not include public/community restaurants in their strategies for food assistance and combating waste. Those consumers who buy their food through supermarkets found supplies severely disrupted, especially in the early stages of Covid-19. There was panic buying and supply chains were disrupted, meaning that many foods were unavailable and shelves empty. In addition, there was an increase in the consumption of industrialized products, of low nutritional quality. Prices also increased in many cases. Where lockdowns occurred suddenly socially-excluded consumers often had no access to food and no means to stock food in advance.

One of the most relevant public food and nutrition security programs that has been discontinued in many cities is school feeding. An FAO survey shows that among cities responding to an electronic form 88% reported having suspended the offer of food to students. The situation of food in the prison system and in institutions that host young people in conflict with the law is also in a critical condition.

By way of contrast, Community Supported Agriculture delivery to consumers has been authorised unilaterally in all countries, even where other forms of direct sales were stopped, mainly because the food is not packaged and is handled safely by producers (with an international chat group sharing safe on-farm practices) and through well-organised socially distanced pick-ups by consumer members of CSAs or home deliveries by producers. It should be noted, however, that home deliveries require greater time and resources, and take time away from on-farm time. On the other hand, there was an increase in application delivery services (IFOD, RAPPI, etc.), which led many people to work in an insecure and overwhelming way. This sparked protests in defense of workers’ rights.

The closure of services, commerce and other non-essential companies has resulted in a serious loss of income and jobs, particularly in the case of those earning daily wages and in low income countries where States have not provided income support. The knock-on effect of no wages/income impacts not only the right to food, but also the right to housing, and there is a current trend of evictions where people are no longer able to pay their rent. Unfortunately, some countries took the opportunity to make economic and public administration adjustments, claiming the need to free up more resources for COVID-19’s confrontation actions. These practices result in more precarious employment relationships and suppression of rights such as social protection.

There are no satisfactory policies for migrant and refugee populations. In many cities, services for these people have been suspended. There is an increase in conflicts due to racism, police violence, corruption. Public demonstrations and street protests have taken place in many locations.

Community responses
“Solidarity between peoples is about offering not leftovers, but what you have.”

The responses take on different characteristics. Some existing actions to combat hunger have been enhanced to face the impacts of COVID-19. Other new initiatives have emerged, conducted by organizations and social movements, or groups of people without previous voluntary work practice, to assist groups in high vulnerability such as people without work and income, homeless people, and drug users in public places. These responses include:

- Organisation by producers and consumers at local level to include local producers in new direct supply chains such as drive-through pick-up points with payments made online to avoid any cash contamination. Direct buying of fish has also been promoted, since fishers have suffered greatly from the lockdowns. Some of the initial interest in buying direct from small-scale food producers through CSAs has since fallen back as people return to their work, but there is still a significant increase.

- Creation of strategies for purchasing food from family farming and donating it to vulnerable groups, constituting extensive networks of popular supply. In some cities, like New York, great efforts have been made to ensure fresh fruit and vegetables are made available to low income groups whose right to food has been impacted, and also to attempt to support access to healthy food, an essential aspect of fighting COVID-19. Likewise, in Brazil, where social movements have been doing huge work to ensure fresh food supply chains to inner city populations through direct supplies in the spirit of solidarity economy.

- Computerization of processes and services developed by social and solidarity-based enterprises such as cooperatives, consumer groups for the sale of healthy and sustainable food and products;

- Creation of voluntary health brigades and promotion of food security, with groups advising on COVID-19, access to social programs and services to ensure social protection, referral to access to basic income, food and drinking water;

- Campaigns against evictions and legal advice for groups at risk;

- Wide social articulation to sensitize parliamentarians at different levels of government to legislative changes to adopt emergency measures. In many locations, charging for water, energy and rent services, for example, has been suspended. Countries like Burkina Faso, France, Republic of Congo, among others, did not allow eviction due to the non-payment of rent in this period. In some cities and provinces, laws have been passed to authorize the provision of hotel spaces for vulnerable populations such as homeless people, migrants and refugees.55

Mexico: fighting corporations’ efforts to profit from the crisis

In the second half of 2020 the % of the population with a salary below what is needed to purchase the basic “food basket” in Mexico will increase from 37% to 45.8%. According to a COVID survey (ENCOVID19) 37% of households report that at least one person in their household lost their source of income and 1 in 3 households suffered a 50% loss of income in March 2020. With school closure, the meals that more than 80,000 schools typically provide to their students have been interrupted.

In this difficult situation companies have developed a variety of marketing strategies targeting families and children taking advantage of the crisis to market ultra-processed foods and beverages, often using phenomena related to the pandemic (stress-eating, etc.). They have also used the crisis to reframe themselves as part of the solution by donating food, money and personal protective equipment. The Sugar Sweetened Beverages (SSB) alliance has tried to position itself as caring deeply for its employees because they keep them at work at a time when many workers have lost their jobs. They use this rationale to justify their continued promotion and sale of SSBs during the crisis, even to vulnerable groups. We have also documented many cases of ultra-processed food companies donating unhealthy foods to mainly indigenous, rural communities, even though

it is known that poor nutritional status and its consequences (obesity and diabetes) make immune systems more prone to the effects of COVID. In particular, we have noted formula companies marketing and promoting their brands through Corporate Social Responsibility actions that offer vulnerable communities one can of 'donated' formula for every can purchased. These types of practices violate the international code for breastmilk substitutes. Just before the pandemic started, a new warning label policy was approved in Mexico to be put on packages of ultra-processed foods. However, the industry adopted the pandemic as a rationale to delay the implementation of this regulation. Movements and NGOs are mobilizing to call for a stop to using the pandemic in this way. A letter was also developed to call upon municipalities to ensure that donations consist in healthy, local, minimally processed food and not formula or ultra-processed foods).

Greater awareness of the importance of healthy and sustainable diets and healthy food systems is being generated. The government has recognized that Mexico’s vulnerability to COVID is very much a result of the obesity and diabetes and chronic disease burden that affects much of the population. The nightly COVID press conference organized by the Ministry of Health often features a member of the government’s inter-sectorial food group, free from industry interference, thus enabling discussion of food, food systems, ultra-processed food, sugary-sweetened beverages and corporate capture of our diets. Food security and food systems are becoming very much a part of the conversation about solutions to deal with COVID. The government has acknowledged that eating a healthy diet is an important component to staying healthy during the crisis. But much work is still to be done…

El poder del consumidor, Mexico

Policy recommendations

• Ensure that national legislation includes framework policies for solidarity economy and human rights-based Covid-19 approaches that guarantee rent moratoriums and right to healthy nutritious culturally adapted food (food sovereignty).
• Establish/maintain basic income initiatives during the pandemic period, and create conditions to boost the economy from a solidarity perspective; encourage the adoption of programs to guarantee basic income linked to the practices of social and solidarity economy with the promotion of cooperatives, self-managed groups.
• Extend the practice of national policy frameworks with delegation for implementation at local government level, focusing on Local Authority support for socially excluded population/those with difficulty to access healthy fresh foods through schemes that enable direct provision and access to direct supplies of agroecological fresh fruit and vegetables.
• Ensure the maintenance of public programs for the purchase of food from agriculture that can contribute to the sustainable development of agricultural areas and access to healthy food, especially to the most vulnerable groups or under the tutelage of the State; Public procurement programs for family farming should be streamlined, and receive financial and logistical contributions at different levels of government.
• Create adequate strategies for urgent access to drinking and quality water; Immediate suspension of any form of eviction or forced migration. Promote the settlement of homeless people and access to land.
• Promote intelligent logistics systems in order to reduce the distances between producers and consumers; consider establishing a local public supply policy. Create different strategies because the majority of the population has difficulties in accessing digital media;
• Cities need to be spaces that promote rights in this period of health crisis. Improve emergency responses in an articulated manner between different levels of government;
• Strengthen the participation of civil society and traditional communities in the design and implementation of policies, notably in this period of emergency but also beyond it.
VOICES FROM THE GROUND: from COVID-19 to radical transformation of our food systems

Women

Background

“We won’t go back to normality, because normality was the problem”. With this sentence projected on the facade of a building in Santiago of Chile in March 2020, grassroots feminists’ movements clearly articulated their perspective on the Covid-19 crisis. This is a profound and unprecedented global crisis that is exacerbating and leveraging pre-existent systemic forms of patriarchal inequalities, oppressions, racism, colonialism, violence and discrimination that cannot be tolerated.

With this sentence capturing the public space and visibility of a building, feminists’ movements also claimed that they would not surrender to isolation and the silencing of their voices, struggles and demands during this pandemic.

It is with this spirit that the Women’s Constituency is contributing to this section of the report by summarizing the overview of experiences, testimonies and key policy demands gathered and highlighted by the CSM Women’s working group report “Gender, Covid-19 and food systems” authored by Jessica Duncan and Priscilla Claeys.

The COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered the structural vulnerabilities and weaknesses of our food systems. Neoliberalism, global capitalism and feudalism have been eroding for decades our social protection and welfare systems, fostering the structural colonial deprivation and grabbing of natural resources of the global south, violating human rights, harming ecosystems and biodiversity and strengthening the sexual division of labor, leaving women to face alone the burden of productive and social reproductive work.

From a feminist perspective the Covid-19 crisis is indeed a global care crisis, where states and governments have failed to prioritize people’s interests, while corporations and transnationals are progressively capturing and dismantling the public commons to impose their own private interest. This pattern is also well reflected in the current production and consumption of food systems.

It has been suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic may add between 83 and 132 million people to the total number of undernourished in the world in 2020 depending on the economic growth scenario. Women are indeed positioned, due to their gender assigned roles, to be disproportionately impacted as they are literally on the front line of the crisis. Women and girls are the majority of food producers and providers for their households, they are the majority of nurses, care and social workers, food and agricultural workers and teachers. Yet, they have been consistently overlooked and invisible in research and responses to the pandemic.

Gender inequality and discrimination is shaping, and will continue to shape, the COVID-19 pandemic in tangible and significant ways. The collective spirit and emotional intensity generated during this time of crisis can be, and has been, mobilized, and their impacts are likely to be greater now. Efforts dedicated to providing mutual aid, monitoring policy makers, defending women and workers’ rights, creating strike funds to extend health benefits to those who lost their jobs, strengthening popular education, organizing food distributions, offer a perspective of the crisis ‘from below’ and provide us with concrete examples of rebuilding social fabrics based on concrete solidarity. Feminist and food sovereignty movements have been, and continue to be, central to these efforts.

Protest and mobilization are usually considered as the key defining feature of social movements, and lockdowns certainly impacted on movements’ ability to organize, in particular for women. Yet, various forms of protest continued despite restrictions. In Philippines, for example, women danced in protest and managed to get the government to distribute aid. The pandemic has dramatically increased repressive measures and state violence, as well as criminalization of women human rights defenders.

---


57 Feudalism: the control over vast tracts of land by a very small, powerful minority of landowners who exploit and oppress rural communities, especially the small and landless producers, particularly in the Asian context.


During the interviews conducted to draft the women’s report, young farmers in the United States reported connecting to their neighbors, via organizations or communities, making sure people had enough food. The Farmers’ organization NFCC organized weekly support phone calls to their members to extend support and advice. We heard about school teachers in Brazil buying food from farmers and distributing it to their students to make up for gaps when school feeding programs were interrupted. Others in Brazil formed groups to organize donations of food products bought from farmers to vulnerable communities in the cities. In Canada, Indigenous peoples spent more time out on the land, hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering to preserve food resources for the rest of the year. Indigenous communities mobilized to distribute food boxes to band members, distributing different catches from fishing expeditions, as well as hunting (24). As reported by one of our interviewees:

In Sri Lanka, there was an increase in seed sharing across different platforms and agro-ecological groups distributed vegetables to medical workers. In West Africa, the small farmers’ network ROPPA organized consultations with their women members to discuss their situation. It also put in place a monitoring and action committee to formulate demands for political dialogue.

In Africa, the workers’ organization IUF developed a leaflet with all necessary information for workers building on lessons learned from Ebola, and developed monitoring tools to ensure corporations respect health and safety measures and that these measures are applied in gender sensitive ways. In Fiji, a COVID-19 Response Gender Working group was established to assess the gendered impacts of COVID-19.

In hundreds of ways, big and small, women have come together to support each other through acts of mutual aid and solidarity. This has been referred to as “resurgence of reciprocity”, that is serving to undo historical efforts by the state and capitalism to “destroy mutual aid, largely through the imposition of private property”60. Across all of these efforts, women have played key roles, with feminist organizations raising awareness and rapidly acting to face the rise of care work, loss of employment, dramatic increase of domestic and gender violence and femicide.

Yet, this wave of activity in response to the crisis was also tempered by the everyday challenges CSOs working on the ground faced as a result of lockdown policies. People we interviewed spoke of their frustration of being unable to be in communities, limited instead to engaging through online platforms. Not surprisingly, connectivity was a major obstacle. Limited connectivity served to further marginalize rural communities and those lacking the financial means to pay for internet access. In many ways, the move online has served to replicate hierarchies of which types of people and movements are visible61.

Experiences around COVID-19 have raised questions about, and prompted further reflection around how to maintain solidarity and social dynamics, reinvent the economy, re-distribute social reproductive work, care for nature and address the climate crisis, while also reinforcing public services. In this way, the pandemic presents us with an opportunity to build new forms of economic and social relations around what women are already doing, and to advance food sovereignty and realization, protection, recognition and fulfillment of human rights.

Key principles to guide policy
In light of the crisis women’s food producers, indigenous peoples and consumers’ movements and organizations have been identify-


ing key principles inherited from the pre-pandemic past and re-focusing them to more effectively respond to the current emergency and crisis. Below you will find a summary of the general principles that have been advanced to guide policies and programs in relation to gender, COVID-19 and food systems. These principles transverse all of the policy demands outlined in the next section of this chapter.

**Participation, representation and decision-making**

Women and women’s grassroots organizations in rural and urban areas must be involved in decision-making and leadership roles in their communities, as well as in policy-making at all levels. These roles may not be accessible to them because of long-standing patriarchal discrimination. A pre-requisite to ensuring adequate participation and representation of women in decision-making processes and programs that affect them is to address social norms. This entails deconstructing social norms that can be deeply rooted in societies and often assumed to be a matter of fact rather than social construction that could evolve.

**Implementation**

Participation, representation and decision-making are crucial principles to guide policy, but they constitute only half of the path. The other half relies in the political duty of states and governments to implement normative frameworks that realize, recognize, fulfill and protect women’s rights. Accountability schemes and people’s-centered monitoring practices should be established as part of the use and application of policy outcomes.

**Human Rights**

Human rights must be respected, protected and fulfilled at all times. When designing and implementing rights-based approaches to policies and programs, specific attention should be paid to international human rights instruments that focus on the rights of women, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its General Recommendation 34 on Rural Women, as well as other declarations and normative instruments protecting indigenous and black women rights.

**Non-discrimination and intersectionality**

- Discrimination can be intersectional - e.g. a peasant woman might be discriminated against due to both her gender and status – and deeply rooted in existing legal and societal systems.
- Intersectionality is a framework that identifies how interlocking systems of power affect those who are most marginalized in society. Discrimination can affect all aspects of social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, age, etc.) and these aspects overlap (or ‘intersect’). Applying an intersectional approach means assessing how multiple forms of oppression come together.

**Feminism and Food Sovereignty**

Feminism have contributed to the food sovereignty paradigm by:

- Creating and claiming of spaces by and for women from all walks of life in production and consumption. These spaces have been crucial for women to develop their own agendas within the food sovereignty movement.
- Incorporating claims focusing on the redistribution and recognition of care work and women’s social productive work.
- Guaranteeing women’s equal access and control over land, territories, water, seeds, information and direct access to markets, among others.
- Fostering and offering a space of linkage between radical food politics, gender justice and agroecology.
- Re-orienting our relationship to production, social-reproduction, nature and ecosystems through agroecology by challenging patriarchal structures inside the family unit and within society as a whole.
- Recognizing women’s crucial role in food sovereignty, including the development of peasant, local, and indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing.
- Integrating food sovereignty struggles and LGBTQIA+ rights. Thus, strengthening a ‘united struggle that challenges gender norms, seeks bodily autonomy, and brings down patriarchal (and related racist and colonial) structures’.
- Shaping community-driven feminisms where multiple cosmovisions and claims converge. Many of them consist of working class and field laborers,
peasant, Indigenous and Afro-descendant women.

**Gender justice, equality and equity**
- Gender justice/equality is a movement towards achieving equal ease of access and control over resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making; and valuing different behaviors, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender.
- A gender-responsive approach is a perspective that actively seeks to address and change rigid norms and imbalances of power that impair gender equality (e.g. by facilitating and supporting alternative agricultural programs that support women-led farms and women as farmers, and promote women’s traditional farming practices).

**Key policy demands**
Building on these principles, a number of key policy demands were formulated on four main areas. For a detailed analysis of the policy demands we invite you to read the full women’s report here.

1. **Economic activities, markets and access to resources**
   - Recognize the role of women as central economic and political actors.
   - Acknowledge and protect women working in the informal economy.
   - Ensure women have equal and non-discriminatory rights and access and control over land and other natural resources.
   - Provide targeted support for women cooperatives and women-led small businesses.
   - Maintain and reinforce local supply chains and food systems.
   - (re)Focus on and re-invest in agro-ecology-based agriculture.
   - Protect workers.

2. **Care work, public health and gender-based violence**
   - Recognize, support, and redistribute unpaid care work.
   - Ensure childcare provisions and adopt family-work conciliation measures.
   - Ensure access to information.
   - Ensure the right to health care and women’s self-determination over their bodies.
   - Maintain public education budgets.
   - Stop gender-based violence.
   - Put an end to all forms of harassment.

3. **Participation, representation and digital equity**
   - Recognize women as key actors and decision makers of agricultural and rural development policies.
   - Actively ensure the meaningful participation of women in rural and urban areas.
   - Invest in women’s leadership and organizations.
   - Fund gender-sensitive research.
   - Democratize internet access and overcoming digital divide.

4. **Government responses and social protection**
   - Ensure all COVID-19 responses are gender-responsive.
   - Prioritize social protection.

Access the fully autonomous report of the Women’s Working Group [here](#).

---

Youth

COVID-19 and the responses of governments to the pandemic are having devastating impacts on young people and their communities. With rising infection rates and increasing food insecurity, and as markets fail, schools close, and jobs disappear, youth see opportunities and hopes for their futures crumble away. But youth are not standing idly by. Youth are among the most active in developing solutions to the challenges facing their communities: youth are organizing themselves to continue providing food for their communities and caring for the elderly as well as children; youth are shortening the distance from producer to consumer; youth are defending school feeding programs and local and territorial markets; youth are caring for and healing the earth by growing nourishing food through agroecological approaches; youth are standing up to domestic violence against women and girls as well as racism, homophobia, xenophobia and patriarchal attitudes and structures; and youth are defending human rights, including women’s and children’s rights, peasant and Indigenous People’s rights, and workers’ and migrants’ rights. Youth are also imagining and creating new ways to organize the world: creating visions of healthy, sustainable and dignified food systems, and taking steps towards these necessary transformations in a socially just way. The CSM Youth Constituency has prepared a Youth Declaration outlining their response to COVID-19 and vision for the future. It can be accessed on the CSM Youth Working Group webpage.

In this section, we outline how COVID-19 and governments’ responses to it are impacting youth, and how youth are responding. We show that while the impacts of COVID-19 are putting significant pressures on youth, youth are not passive victims in need of charity, or simply “workers” in need of jobs. On the contrary, youth are engaged, informed, and active political subjects, with a diversity of experiences and perspectives that should be taken seriously by governments and integrated into policy. The youth of today are leading us all into tomorrow, and must be included meaningfully in political decision-making processes that affect their lives and the well-being of their families and communities. This applies especially to young Indigenous Peoples and small-scale food producers and workers that comprise the CSM constituencies. As the reform of the CFS acknowledges, we, the rights holders, are the majority food producers globally, yet the most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, and it is the responsibility of governments, the duty bearers, to keep this at the forefront of all their policy discussions and actions. In the section that follows, we first outline some of the impacts of COVID-19 on young food producers, workers, and consumers. We then describe some of the youth responses to the pandemic, and finally, we outline some key demands of governments for policy responses and the expectations youth have for meaningful inclusion in political decision-making processes.

Impacts on Youth

The impacts on youth of COVID-19 and the responses from governments have been widespread. We highlight a few here. First, youth have been impacted by both a loss of jobs in the formal and so-called informal sectors, and in many cases, by the failure of states to provide adequate (or any) social protection. As countries have gone into lockdowns and as economies have stalled, many youth have lost their employment, and with it their income. New workplace regulations are impacting workers as well as individuals trying to access services, particularly in the so-called informal sectors. For example, in Mozambique, all commercial services must close at 5pm, impacting informal workers in the agricultural sector, as well as the functioning of local and territorial markets. The loss of jobs has also been highly uneven across socio-economic classes. In India, for example, the wealthy and those with steady, often high-paying jobs that can be done from home have been able to maintain a degree of financial security during the pandemic – while those already marginalized and vulnerable have been faced with increasingly precarious work or have lost their livelihoods completely.

Compounding the descent into precarity, many youth have lost access, do not have access to or have insufficient access to social protection schemes. Without employment and with inadequate or non-existing social protection, many youth do not have the means for ensuring basic needs like clean water, sanitation, food, shelter, and health.
care, leading to multiple human rights violations such as violations to the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to food. Further still, many of those who have continued to work, for example those working in meat processing, in grocery stores, and in the fields, as well as other food sellers (e.g. working in delivery apps), are now doing so with increased exposure to the virus and without adequate protection, and/or in crowded conditions that do not permit the observance of social distancing guidelines. In Puerto Rico, for example, it has been difficult to find sanitary and protective gear for the small producers and agriculture workers over the last few months. This puts workers and their families at risk of being exposed to COVID-19.

In addition, government responses to Covid-19 have impacted rights to movement and travel as borders have closed. Many youth rely on jobs abroad – and the ability to send remittances home – in order to meet their basic needs and care for their families and communities. As a result of COVID-19, many seasonal migrant agricultural workers have been unable to gain access to employment abroad. When migrant workers have made it abroad for work, they have often faced unimaginable working conditions. Migrant workers around the globe already work under precarious conditions – and these conditions have been exacerbated by COVID-19. In Canada, for example, migrant workers have had to quarantine and then reside in crowded bunkhouses that do not allow for social distance or proper sanitation. These bunkhouses already failed to meet standard for adequate housing, but in the pandemic they became virus hotspots. Workers who were asymptomatic were also made to continue working, even if they tested positive for the virus. Multiple migrant workers have died, including youth workers. This has led to right to health, right to food, right to adequate shelter, right to decent conditions of work and countless other human rights violations.

The systemic undervaluing of the agricultural sector and young agricultural workers has also been exposed in other high income countries like Australia, which relies heavily on cheap labour of young “backpackers” to do essential harvesting work on farms. While this labour practice is marketed as a way for young people to travel and as work experience, it has been criticised as exploitative long before the pandemic. Rather than placing the blame on farmers, we should look to the effects of neoliberal government food and agriculture policies which have resulted in a cost-price squeeze for farmers, putting them in a position where they cannot afford to pay their workers a living wage. Now, with restricted mobility across international borders due to the pandemic, Australia is facing a massive shortage of farm workers, potentially leaving thousands of tonnes of food to rot in the fields and driving prices of fresh fruit and vegetables up at a time when many Australians have lost their jobs or are working less hours due to the pandemic. Ironically, policy responses have been oriented to securing cheaper imports of highly processed foods from overseas, rather than to providing support to domestic small-scale fresh fruit and vegetable producers. Although Australia is now urging its young people to step in to respond to the labour shortage, it has not addressed the structural issue of poor wages and exploitative labour conditions that persist in the food and agriculture sector.

Second, youth have experienced disrupted learning as schools closed during lockdowns. This may have long-term implications for youth attempting to pursue their education, as well as for youth whose children are now at home, impacting their care-giver’s ability to work. However, the impacts of school closures are not even, and have a greater effect on some. For example, COVID-19 has exacerbated the digital divide, and who can access and realize their right to education from home. Many without the technology such as computers or smartphones, or who lack access to internet at home will be unable to continue their education. Youth whose parents are working may also not get the support they need to complete their lessons. Youth relying on school meals have had to go without, impacting their access to healthy and nutritious food and their right to food and nutrition. Women are assuming more of the childcare, as children are not in school. This may have lasting impacts on gender equality in the workforce as well as in the home. Now as societies and economies reopen, youth are put at the front line of the pandemic, reentering schools that have not received
adequate funding to keep them healthy and safe.

Third, and as already alluded to, youth have experienced increased care-giving responsibilities during COVID-19. Youth regularly serve in care-giving roles to their own children, their siblings, their parents and others. The closing of schools, the lockdowns, and the other government responses to COVID-19, have required youth to make difficult decisions between their education, their livelihoods and their responsibilities to their families and communities. The burden has fallen particularly on women and young women. Women make up the majority of frontline healthcare workers and childcare workers outside of the home and are therefore at a much higher risk of exposure to the coronavirus. Women around the world also bear the burden of care and domestic responsibilities in the home, and young women are often expected to take up this unpaid care-work, impacting their ability to pursue their education. These issues further reveal the already-existing structural and systemic unequal burden on women and young women for meeting care responsibilities.

Finally, COVID-19 and the responses of governments have also exacerbated the already simmering multiple crises impacting youth. We have seen systemic racism and sexism on the rise around the globe. In places like South Africa and the United States, police violence and domestic violence against women have increased with the regulations responding to COVID-19. The stylization of COVID-19 as a health crisis underlines how the risks, suffering and endangerment of some people – Black people, People of Color, Indigenous peoples, Women, people with disabilities and poor people – continues to be normalised and neglected, while the risks, suffering and endangerment of people belonging to the white middle and upper classes of the Global North are immediately taken up as a crisis in need of serious political responses. In many countries, democratic structures are being challenged and dismantled by the increasing power of the far-right, whose racist, exclusionary and violent politics are leaving the most marginalized parts of society vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 and the multiple crises currently happening. Indeed, already marginalized populations such as women, racialized peoples, people discriminated against on the basis of religion or caste, LGBTQI+ individuals and communities, people with disabilities, rural peoples, Indigenous Peoples, and others are, in many places around the world, feeling the impacts of COVID-19 the most, both in terms of direct impacts of the virus (infection rates, health impacts, mortality rates), as well as in terms of the indirect impacts associated with rising poverty and food insecurity. Youth smallholders, fisherfolks, pastoralists, urban food insecure, and other constituencies are now having to respond to the hardships related to COVID-19 and governments’ responses to it, in addition to the accelerating pressures of global warming and environmental degradation, driven by global industrial capitalism. Governments worldwide are still prioritizing an industrial, capitalist economic model of food production, distribution, and consumption. While corporate food industry executives get richer, their workers struggle to feed themselves, pay their medical bills, care for their families and communities, and survive. This is because our current food system policies, regulations and laws place a higher value on shareholder profits and corporate control than on human health, dignity, and the right to be nourished by and connected to land, culture, and community. Thus, government responses to COVID-19 have similarly often favored large-scale producers and left smallholder producers with little support.

Despite these significant impacts on youth, they are working hard to respond proactively to the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Youth call on their governments to pay attention to these responses, some of which are listed below, and to engage with youth to support them and their communities when formulating policy responses to the pandemic.
How Youth are Responding

Youth around the globe have been responding to COVID-19 and its impact on their communities in numerous ways. Youth have been organizing to produce and distribute food to their communities. They have been caring for the elderly as well as our children. They have been taking care of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, running soup kitchens and public canteens. In this way, they have been practicing the communitarian values of a solidarity economy, and have followed a feminist perspective that puts care at the centre of our society. Along with supporting their communities, youth are shortening the distance between producers and consumers, thereby providing a vital service and ensuring food security for the most vulnerable. Youth often lack government support and even struggle in the face of active oppression and human rights violations from states. Striving for food systems that realize agroecology, youth have responded to COVID-19 by working to re-integrated food into its territories of production. They have re-established connections between consumers and producers of food, re-established understanding and appreciation on both sides. They have helped consumers re-connect to the land, ecosystem and labor that feeds them on a daily basis, and supported producers’ struggles against the pressures of the global food market.

For example, student youth groups in Brazil have been organizing “Cestas Verdes” (or “Green baskets”) with healthy food from a MST (Landless Rural Workers Movement) assessment called “17 de Abril” (or assessment “Boa Sorte”), in Restinga-SP and from COOPERVAL, an organic food cooperative group from Claraval-MG. The baskets are delivered by municipal social services institutions, who have access to the information of people in social vulnerability. With the baskets, they also deliver a flyer with information about prevention habits during the pandemic, including what to do if women are experiencing domestic violence, as well as recipes for the food they are receiving. In these ways, youth are working to stimulate healthy food habits, talking about daily problems, helping with the outflow of small farmer’s production and enabling people in situations of social vulnerability to eat nutritious food.

Youth have also been demanding human rights, and have not allowed COVID-19 to be an excuse for rights violations. Youth are standing up to domestic violence against women and girls as well as racism, homophobia, xenophobia and the patriarchy. They are championing the rights of women, Black, Indigenous and other People of Color, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex people, migrants, refugees, and others – and working towards recognizing the multiplicities of identities and the diversity of youth around the globe. Youth are defending workers’ and migrants’ rights – and the realization of the right to safe conditions of work, the right to union representation, the rights to collective bargaining, and the right to living wages. They are demanding fair, safe and healthy working environments that are free from any form of discrimination, violence, and/or harassment. Youth have been protesting government repression and the weakening of democratic institutions. Youth have exercised their rights to political speech and peaceful assembly. For example, youth in the United States are participating in the Black Lives Matter uprisings, leading them in many cities, as well as supporting protests by food chain workers and folks working in meat packing plants demanding their rights and hazard pay.

Finally, Youth have continued to imagine alternative worlds: plural worlds, worlds that go far beyond business-as-usual, worlds in which our ways of doing the economy, of producing and consuming food, of caring for each other, of living with and as part of nature, are radically transformed. Youth are learning from and exchanging with different struggles, movements, institutions and alternative voices. Through practicing and sharing diverse knowledges and cultures, including Indigenous knowledges and practices, Youth are resisting growing corporatization of our food system while co-creating life-affirming worlds and futures by building strong connections to the land, water, seeds, plants, and all living beings. At the same time, youth have been educating themselves, their family members, and community members about our food system, about food sovereignty and agroecology. They have been sharing practices and knowledges within and between our communities, engaging in horizontal exchanges of knowledge, such as peasant-to-peasant, fisher-to-fisher, pastoralist-to-pastoralist, consumer-and-producer knowledge exchanges, as well as intergenerational exchanges. Finally, youth are demanding a seat at the table and leadership positions in social movements, communities, governments and global governance spaces, like the CFS.
Landless in India: Eviction and Displacement continue with COVID-19

Despite the Covid crisis, municipal corporations and other agencies continue to evict so-called ‘encroachers’ from the public places. The police and administration showed no respect for basic norms and practices in doing so. On the one hand we are asking people to stay in and on the other side demolishing their homes despite the fact that United Nations Human Rights Commission and UN Housing Rights Rapporteur have categorically asked governments to put a complete moratorium on evictions and displacement.

Ram Kumar Ahirwar, a dalit farmer used to cultivate a piece of land which was basically government land. Most of the poor settle in those areas which are worst off and empty to make a living for themselves. But as the land looked ‘precious’, adjacent to city, the government take it back with intimidation and barbaric police atrocity on the family. The entire crop is destroyed by the shameless officials who don’t feel the pain of the farmer who cultivate a land, even if on paper it might not be his land. Shouldn’t it be considered illegal to destroy crops waiting for harvesting? Now, governments have become ‘real estate agents’ and hence all those places, where homeless and landless people might be living for years, have become ‘encroachers’. The mindset of the administration is filled with deep-rooted caste prejudices that work more if the persons belong to Dalits and Adivasis category. The fact is that most of the government land in our villages and cities has been encroached by the dominant castes, part and parcel of the government structure, and nothing happens to them.

According to reports more than 14000 families have been dislocated so far. Reports from Polavaram, Telganana suggests that over 17000 families mostly Adivasis i.e. tribals will be uprooted and will have to be rehabilitated from nearly 34 villages by the end of August as the height of the Polavarm dam is being increased to 41.5 meters. By December end, there will be more displacement. All over the country, such displacement and demolition of slums is taking place and most of the affected people belong to Dalits, Adivasis and poor minorities i.e. either Dalit Christians or Dalit Muslims. It is these people who face the biggest threat as even if they return home they won’t find a space to work on. The first question is how can our citizens be declared as ‘migrants’, but then migration is the actually the reflection of our caste structure in the villages where a majority of Dalits don’t possess any land. To protect them from humiliation in their daily work, they migrate to cities and live in utterly filthy conditions but at least remain protected from the humiliation or sexual onslaught of the feudal dominant people in the villages.

The key to this crisis is the failure of the Land Reforms agenda in the villages. Since independence, we failed to implement comprehensive agrarian reforms and agriculture remain caged in the hands of the dominant caste forces in the villages where discrimination is still order of the day. Land Redistribution was never on the agenda of the governments as well as Land Ceilings laws were rarely implemented. Most of the Land Ceiling cases are biting dust at various districts and high courts. Even the Covid -19 crisis impacted the landless the most finds a study as published by the Indian Express.

“Preliminary findings of a survey of more than 1,000 agricultural households across 12 Indian states show that 60% of those who did harvest reported a yield loss, and 1/10th of them could not harvest their crop in the past month. More than half (56%) of the farmers said that the lockdown has impacted their ability to prepare for the upcoming sowing season. The survey has found a “very strong association between food insecurity & farm size, with landless farmers 10 times more likely to skip a meal in the past month compared to large farmers”.

The dirty fact is that 51% of rural India is landless and a majority of them are Dalit, Adivasi and most backward communities including nomadic communities. So it is not merely economy but a cultural system which has kept people subjugated for centuries and this pandemic has only reinforced those values. In fact the post Covid-19 situation can be much dangerous as more people will return to the villages and in the absence of work and land there may be a social chaos.

Dr.Burnad Fathima Natesan, Focal point of the CSM Landless constituency.
Pastoralists


Information collected in 12 countries of West and Central Africa (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Benin, Togo, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad) highlights the negative impacts on agropastoral activities and on the living conditions of the actors concerned. This new sanitary crisis has intervened in a context of multiples crises affecting territories that were already heavily affected by the insecurity that has prevailed in the region for a number of years. A number of risks have already been identified:

- **A long-term crisis of pastoralism**: The crisis linked to COVID-19 may be a deep and widespread one, similar to the pastoral crisis in the Sahel in the 1970s and 1980s. It risks depriving the agropastoral populations of their means of existence, that is their herds. The death of cattle cannot be avoided due to the limitations on movements and seasonal migrations. The result could be an erosion of the reproductive nucleus and a significant increase in the offer of weakened cattle on the markets, leading to a progressive deterioration of prices.

- **Risk of famine in the family farms**: The agropastoral family farms are without doubt among the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Seasonal migration is a practice they have developed to address shocks. If they cannot practice it their whole range of resilience mechanisms will be threatened and we are likely to see a recurrence of famine leading to a break-down of families and massive exodus towards urban centers.

- **Surge of rural conflicts**: Pastoral resources are under pressure, their carrying capacity is exceeded and this will increase conflicts among the different actors.

- **A significant reduction in the offer of animal protein** for the local populations.

- **A socio-economic crisis** that could threaten social cohesion. Enrolling of some herders in armed groups due to the deep degradation of their living conditions and the loss of social capital.

APESS and its members are committed to urgent action to fight against COVID-19, support for measures aimed at restoring the productive capacities of agropastoral family farms in the short-term, and undertaking forward-looking reflection to support the formulation and application of long-term recovery plans.

**Iran’s nomadic pastoralists**

Nomadic pastoralists in Iran play an important role in national food security and sovereignty. Since the arrival of COVID-19, they have been deeply concerned about the impact that the pandemic is likely to have on them. Their recently established national platform, the Union of Indigenous Nomadic Tribes of Iran (UNINOMAD) outlined its members’ concerns and proposed solutions in a letter sent to key national authorities on 10 March. While they believe that the seasonal migration must be delayed to prevent the spread of the disease, they are concerned about several negative consequences that could ensue. Delayed seasonal migration could cause weight loss and illness in livestock due to rising temperatures in wintering grounds, as well as extra expenses for buying feed and water. Their delayed arrival at the summering grounds could leave these pastures vulnerable to encroachment by, and conflicts with, neighboring rural communities (a common occurrence).

Added to that, livestock markets (as well as restaurants, hotels, tourism activities and all gatherings) are either closed or not active due to social distancing regulations. Furthermore, when markets do open again, they could be faced with excess supply, driving down prices. It should be noted that one of the government’s key concerns is providing food at the lowest possible prices (including through imports) to feed citizens already under economic strain from years of sanctions. In response to these challenges, UNINOMAD made a number of proposals for government support. The letter was the most pro-active and strongest action the union has ever taken, suggesting that the crisis has strengthened pastoralists’ sense of their essential role in society as food producers.
Herders in Mongolia (video-recorded interview)

Mongolia closed its borders as a measure to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the country. This move resulted in many factories reducing their production. In effect, herders are not able to sell raw materials including wool, cashmere, as well as meat products to the factories. Herders rely on selling wool for their livelihood, but right now, the price has dropped as no one is buying. They are asking for their government to help them by controlling the market price so they can overcome the challenges brought about by the pandemic.

2.2 Regions

Africa

This section is based on inputs from a range of African small-scale producer and civil society organizations: African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), Alliance for Food Sovereignty Africa (AFSA), Association pour la promotion de l'éleve au Sahel et en savanne (APESS), Biowatch, Comunidade dos Paises de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP), Conseil National de Concertation des Ruraux du Sénégal (CNCR), Forum ROPPA-PAFAO-JAFOWA, INADES, Minority Rights Group, Plateforme Régionale des Organisations Paysannes de l'Afrique Centrale (PROPAC), Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA), World March of Women. Organizational sources are cited in parentheses in the text and live links are provided to the more detailed references.

Snapshot of official positions

Africa has been singled out for special concern by the international community from the outset of the pandemic for the worrisome impacts that COVID-19 could be expected to have. According to FAO, 'countries at the highest risk of suffering from a potential food crisis sparked off from the pandemic in Africa.' An authoritative official statement on the situation and the measures to be taken to address it is the 'Declaration on Food Security and Nutrition during the COVID-19 Pandemic' adopted by the meeting of African Ministers for Agriculture hosted by FAO on 16 April, which echoes messages issued in a joint FAO-AU policy brief of 12 April.

Among the factors placing African countries at particular risk the Declaration cites their ‘dependence on extra-regional imports for food…, which makes them more vulnerable to disruptions in international logistics and distribution’. The labour-intensive nature of Africa’s food and agriculture systems (with the majority of the population deriving their livelihoods from small-scale agriculture) is seen to be problematic given the lock-down restrictions of people’s and labour mobility that have been introduced. Finally, COVID-19 is considered to exacerbate a situation of already high rates of hunger, malnutrition and poverty which the Declaration attributes to challenges such as the desert locus outbreak, fall armyworm impacts, drought, conflict and insecurity (without referencing the impacts of policies that have penalized small-scale food production and rural areas over the years). Governments are in-

---

65 Available at http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/fao-au-ministerial-meeting/en/
VOICES FROM THE GROUND: from COVID-19 to radical transformation of our food systems

vited to prioritize the food and agriculture systems as an essential service and to ‘recognize that all types of food systems – modern, tradition and informal – play critical roles in serving different markets and sustaining important parts of the population’. The 12 April joint brief, however, acknowledges that traditional food markets are of particular importance to African consumers since they represent around 80 to 90 per cent of all food sales on the continent.

**The context in which COVID-19 has appeared**

African producer organizations emphasize that the family farming is the main segment of the continent’s agriculture and food systems. Over the past years, they note, Africa has experienced multiple crises which have fragilized family farms and engendered food insecurity. These include recurrent environmental and climate crises, persistent socio-political crises, endemic conflicts with regard to the use of natural resources, violence and human rights violations - all of these fueling youth migration - and now a health and systemic crisis with the outburst of the COVID 19 pandemic. These multiple crises have highlighted the limitations and fragility of development policies and services provided by public institutions. There has been a failure in governance, a lack of relevance and consistency in public policies, and a lack of commitment to sovereign funding for their implementation (ROPPA 2).

The outward orientation African countries’ food and agriculture sector and their dependence on food imports places them in a perpetual situation of stress and puts them at the mercy of a volatile and unstable world market and (Forum ROPPA-PAFOA-JAFOWA). African governments continue to invest too little in the agriculture sector, 16 years after the Maputo Declaration committed them to dedicating at least 10% of the national budget to this priority area. In countries with mining and petrol resources, like Mozambique, agriculture is often ignored. Generally speaking, governments are privileging green revolution technology and agribusiness production and distribution models rather than the family farming and territorial food systems and markets that feed most of the population. Corporate investments and the bulk of foreign aid and policy advice pressurize them in this direction, with the Gates Foundation and AGRA playing a leading role (AFSA 1, ROPPA 1, ROPPA 2, INADES). The eco-system disruption caused by industrial agriculture’s invasiveness has helped to open the door to COVID-19 (ACB 1).

**Impacts of COVID-19** (ROPPA 1, ROPPA 2, PROPAC, Forum ROPPA-PAFOA-JAFOWA, APESS, Biowatch, CPLP, ACB 2, INADES)

**Inadequate protection from the virus**

Rural populations have been disproportionately affected by limited access to information about the virus, protective materials, health services, and the clean water needed to practice basic prevention. This situation is a reflection of decades of urban bias and neglect of rural environments and communities.

**Production, marketing and access to food**

Lock-downs and curfews have had tragic impacts on small-scale food producers, informal processors and sellers, as well as consumers. The interruption or irregular functioning of rural markets has left producers without an outlet for their products. The situation is aggravated by the closure of other outlets such as restaurants and the curtailing of festivities that are normally accompanied by feasts. The closing of schools has impacted negatively both on the children who have lost their access to a good meal each day, and on the local producers in cases in which their products were privileged in the public procurement programmes. Government measures have privileged supermarkets over the rural markets and informal shops.
in urban areas in which the majority of the population access their food. The result has been to put whole sectors of the population in difficulty and to support agribusiness and global supply chains at the expense of local food systems. The promotion of imported processed products risks exacerbating the pre-existing trends to change in consumer habits away from consumption of local foods and to impact negatively on the health of consumers, above all of food insecure urban populations.

In many countries small-scale producers and agricultural workers have not been exempted from the lock-down measures, making it impossible for them to work in their fields and harvest crops. High levels of food waste have been reported, as crops rot in the fields. Small-scale fishers, often overlooked by government support, have been severely impacted, particularly in areas in which the best fishing is done at night or in the early morning. Pastoralists have been blocked from their traditional transhumance patterns. Combined with the suspension of veterinary services this has provoked high rates of mortality among the flocks. The production and marketing of milk, as a highly perishable product, is in extreme difficulty, as are the perishable fruits and vegetables which are indispensable ingredients in healthy diets.

Concerns are expressed in all regions of Africa regarding difficulties of obtaining access to inputs and fields in time for the agricultural season. The situation is most serious in countries where small-scale producers are not encouraged to reproduce their own seeds and are dependent on ‘improved’ imported seeds.

Reduced incomes, increased poverty and malnutrition
The revenues of family farms have been reduced by lack of access to markets as well as a reduction of the remittances from family members in urban areas or abroad. It is reported that many families are finishing their food stocks earlier than usual, presaging a difficult lean season. Producers of export crops are just as badly affected as those producing for domestic markets due to the interruptions in international transport, illustrating another aspect of the vulnerability induced by dependence on fragile and volatile global supply chains. The distribution of cereals decreased by 80% in Cabo Verde compared to the previous 5-year average. As a result stocks of these cereals will run out faster than normal, making families more dependent on markets at a time when sources of income are being threatened (CPLP).

Women are the key actors in meeting the family’s food needs and in small-scale processing and marketing of products. They have suffered both from lack of access to their fields and to raw materials such as fish (due to restricted access to landing areas) and of market outlets for their products. Here too their disadvantaged situation is the product of decades of marginalization and violation of their rights.

The informal sector, in which people’s incomes depend on what they are able to earn day by day, has been heavily hit. A large proportion of this sector are women. Reduction of the income of informal workers is reducing the demand for food as well as worsening their status regarding hunger and malnutrition. Food prices have tended to increase, with intermediaries taking the lion’s share. In urban areas in South Africa price hikes are resulting in increases to a family food basket that are almost as high as the increase in social grants provided by government (Biowatch).

Violence and attacks on democracy
The pandemic and related measures are intensifying tensions among social groups like herders and settled farmers that had been reduced over the past years. They are pushing young people and those who have lost their livelihoods towards migration or joining armed terrorist bands.

Police violence and brutality in enforcing lock-
downs and curfews has been reported, particularly in marginalized urban areas (e.g. Kenya, Uganda, South Africa). Government corruption has also been reported in their relations with corporate actors and in connection with distribution of aid. Violence against women, both within the family and outside, is on the rise. Some systematically marginalized minority groups are suffering terrible violations of their right to food under COVID 19. These include the Batwa in Rwanda, the Benet community in Uganda, and stateless communities like the Nubian and the Benet in Kenya (Minority Rights Group).

Reactions and responses

Solidarity
There are reports from all regions of Africa concerning solidarity initiatives undertaken by communities, producers’ organizations and civil society associations, most often building on the strongly embedded traditions of solidarity that characterise African society. Considerable efforts have been made to make information about the pandemic and how to avoid infection available to those with least access to it, particularly in rural areas, using channels of communication ranging from word of mouth to leaflets in local languages and community radios (ROPPA 1). Producers’ organizations and civil society organizations have also been active in distributing health kits and food boxes to the needy (ROPPA 1, PROPAC, CNCR, Biowatch, CPLP, ACB 3).

Innovations in production and marketing
A perceptive feedback from Zimbabwe notes that despite the lockdown ‘territorial markets have their ways of adapting’, such as pop-up road-side marketing and crossborder trading, and are more flexible and resilient than formal retail chains (AFSA 2). Other reported marketing innovations include on-line sales and home delivery, sale of home-made dishes, and whatsapp groups to reach out to potential public buyers. Collective action by producers’ groups to address problems like input purchase is on the rise. The pandemic is also reported to be promoting greater interest in agroecology on the part both of producers and consumers, with the heightened attention to the quality of food. In urban areas connections are being made between small-scale producers and communities in need of food, laying the groundwork for new localised production and distribution systems (Biowatch).

Networking and policy dialogue
Producers organizations and civil society associations are intensifying their networking, analysis and policy dialogue with governments at all levels. In Central Africa PROPA-Gis undertaking a study involving its national platforms in developing an assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 on family farming and policy and action proposals to address them. Multiple webinars have been organized, bringing together producers organizations, CSOs and government authorities (, AFSA 2, ACB 2). In West Africa 12 regional producer organizations and CSO networks, led by ROPPA, APESS and RBM, have established a Monitoring and Action Committee which dialogues with the regional intergovernmental bodies. The goals are to help stop the spread of covid, restore productive capacity for the coming season, and promote global recovery. The Committee is developing policy proposals aimed at fostering sustainable territorial food systems in order to reduce food dependency, reinforce the resilience of family farms and rural communities, ensure the economic development of territories, and create employment for women and young people (ROPPA 2). In South Africa a C-19 Peoples Coalition has been established, bringing food-oriented groups such as the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign together with others addressing other socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Their policy proposals include replacing food parcels with vouchers to be spend at informal shops to stimulate the local economy and successfully lobbying

![Image of a woman in a mask]
the government to extend to small-scale pro-
ducers the disaster relief support which origi-
nally privileged the industrial farming model
(Biowatch).

At national level policy dialogue is already pro-
ducing positive results in some cases. In Benin
thanks to lobbying by the national producers' platform the government has co-developed a plan to address the impacts of COVID on ag-
riculture and food security which is already
receiving support from several donors (ROP-
PA 1). In Senegal the national platform CNCR
has conducted an assessment of the concer-
ns of all of the sectors, organized debates
by peasant experts, and formulated proposals
for local and national authorities. Some of the
short-term requests have already been satis-
fied, such as re-opening of local markets, en-
suring access of women fish processors to the
landing areas, and facilitating movements of
pastoralists. Long-term trans-sectoral policy
proposals on the table include lower interest
rates for agricultural credit, support for agro-
ecology, investments in territorial markets, and
the inclusive formulation of a new national ag-
gricultural policy. In other cases, however (e.g.
Mozambique, Kenya), government authorities
are reported to be less receptive to peoples' pro-
tests and proposals.

Conclusions

The feedback from social actors highlights a
serious incoherence in African governments' poli-
cies and programmatic choices. They rec-
ognize that dependence on food imports and
the extroversion of the economy are key fac-
tors of vulnerability and they acknowledge
that family farming is the backbone of the con-
tinent's agricultural, food and social systems.
Yet they continue to make choices that rhe-
torically place all food systems on the same
footing and in practice privilege corporate-led
industrial agriculture and global supply chains.
African producers’ organizations and CSOs
deplore the weight of outside political and
economic interests in governmental deci-
sion-making processes and the inadequate
provisions made for participation by social
actors, particularly at continental level. Even
where regional policies have been formulat-
ed in an inclusive manner, as in West Africa,
the authorities are inadequately committed to
their implementation.

COVID-19 has only unveiled and exacerbat-
ed the systemic problems that have plagued
African agriculture and food systems for de-
cades. This is the decisive moment to go for
a profound transformation in the direction of
sustainable agroecological production, territo-
rially embedded food systems, and more ro-
bust democracy and respect for human rights.
CFS policy outcomes are useful instruments
in this regard (particularly the Tenure Guide-
lines and policy recommendations on Invest-
ing in Smallholder Agriculture and Connecting
Smallholders to Markets), along with the UN
Decade on Family Farming and UNDROP.

‘Over the past decades family farmers have
developed innovative technologies of adap-
tation and mitigation of climate change that
have allowed them to continue to cover most
of the food needs of the rural and urban popu-
lation. Today we are facing an unprecedented
combination of serious and far-reaching crises.
Yet we are hopping from one crisis to another
without a systemic and holistic reflection on
how to address them in a structural manner.
We need to return to the regional agricultural
policy that we have built together and ensure
coherence across the range of policies: agri-
cultural, trade, macro-economic. This is the
cry of alarm that producers’ organizations raise
today.’ Ibrahima Coulibaly, President, ROPPA 1

“We cannot go back to normal. We must de-
mand public health, education, all the basic
services to which we are entitled, which are
public. We need to democratize and socialize
our food system. We need agroecology, we
need to produce and consume locally and, at
the same time, demand global climate justice.
We cannot depend on agribusiness to feed
ourselves. This is the time for the world to rec-
ognize the role of local food production and
also the role of women in agriculture, since
60% of food production is carried out by wom-
en.”

World March of Women, Africa
Asia

Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic has made visible the stark realities of long-standing, multi-generational social, economic, and political inequality in Asia. Class, social privilege, race/ethnicity, caste, gender, occupation, and age determine who are most vulnerable to the virus, and who suffer the worst impacts of the ‘pandemic package’ which include infection as well as governmental responses to tackle the pandemic. Heredity aside, many pre-existing co-morbidity conditions—diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, respiratory/pulmonary conditions and low immunity—exist because of and are exacerbated by existing inequalities, which determine access to good quality, affordable health care; adequate, healthy diets; safe housing, working and living environments; regular clean water supply and sanitation; and income for basic needs and personal protective equipment (PPE).

In much of South and Southeast Asia, neoliberalism has proven to be a critical systemic pre-existing condition, resulting in decades of official neglect of the public realm integral to building robust public health, welfare, and food systems, including public provision of essential goods, services, adequate food and shelter; social protection and justice; environmental regulations; public participation and; fundamental rights and civil liberties. These, combined with the prioritization of global food chains, trade and investment over self-reliance have rendered much of the region’s population vulnerable to food and economic shocks. Provided here is a synthesis of impacts and responses to COVID-19 in Asia, drawing primarily from experiences in Pakistan, India, Thailand, Cambodia and the Philippines.
Asian case study #1
Asian case study #2
Asian case study #3

Impacts
The impacts of COVID-19 in Asia vary across countries although some commonalities are clearly visible. Social and economic impacts have been compounded by political measures that inhibit public participation, access to information, freedom of speech and association, and enable violence and criminalization of particular ethnicities, religions and castes.

The rapid spread of the coronavirus, lack of coordination and direction across government sectors over containment and treatment protocols, and under-resourcing of public hospitals, health centres and personnel at the front lines of tackling the disease, have resulted in a near collapse of already enfeebled public health systems. Early COVID containment measures and protocols were also confusing and contradictory, reflecting lack of awareness of ground realities, attention to recommendations from health providers, and gender, class and social “blindness.” Containment measures disproportionately hurt small-scale food producers, local vendors, workers (in both formal and informal sectors), and landless peoples who constitute the majority of migrant, manual labourers. Closures of small businesses, neighborhood groceries, local markets, and street vending decreased the availability of staple foods for the majority, as well as decreased jobs and incomes for local food producers and workers. Overall, the loss of incomes, existing debt burdens and additional food and health-care costs have pushed hundreds of millions into deeper poverty.68

Small-scale agricultural and food producers, and landless rural peoples were already facing multiple, long-standing challenges from climate change, land grabbing and land conversions, environmental destruction, expansion of industrial agriculture, capture of water sources, lack of affordable credit, rising in-

68 COVID-19 is leaving India hungry in more ways than one
debtedness, and privatization of essential services. COVID-19 related strictures exacerbated these challenges, notably through disruptions to production, storage, distribution and employment. Although reductions in food availability affect the public at large, disruptions of small-scale, localized production, exchange and vending resulted in high levels of food and income insecurity among rural and urban poor.

The most common response by Asian governments in the first few months of the pandemic was to impose lockdowns that severely restricted transport and travel; shut down industry and services (except those deemed essential); halted almost all livelihood and economic activities, and; closed local markets and informal vending that urban and rural poor depend on for income and food. Although mandatory restrictions to contain the spread of the virus were necessary, the lack of sufficient advance notice, planning, preparation, consultation with relevant actors and support/relief measures resulted tremendous hardships for small-scale food producers, workers, landless peoples and urban poor communities. In some countries, lockdown rules were unclear, and/or selectively and violently applied, causing fear and hardship: for example in India, although agricultural activities and deliveries of essential goods/services were legally permitted, in many states, farmers were prevented from harvesting crops and street vendors were violently attacked by police. In Cambodia, garment workers were prevented from travelling to their home villages although factories closed, and rural communities blocked by armed police from patrolling forests to report illegal logging and land clearance. In the Philippines and Myanmar, violations of curfews and COVID specific orders were punished by hefty fines and arrests.

In China, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, South Korea and the state of Kerala in India, lockdowns were accompanied by testing, contact tracing, isolation, treatment, and social support. But in many countries, lockdowns were practically the sole containment measure, with meagre social-economic support for those without economic reserves to withstand their severity. In Pakistan, India, Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines, lockdowns left tens of millions of informal sectors, agricultural, entertainment, hospitality, construction and domestic workers, and street vendors without incomes, shelter, food, water and healthcare. Most urban and rural poor did not have the means to practice health safety protocols, putting them at high risk of infection. For daily wage earners, the loss of daily incomes resulted in hunger. Restrictions on movement, closures of local markets, absence of credit and lack of required support services hit small-scale food producers hard, setting the stage for food shortages and food price hikes. Across Asia, harsh enforcement of lockdowns exposed women to additional risks in feeding their families and ensuring basic needs.

Closures of restaurants, recreation, and shopping centres resulted in a surge of unemployment and under-employment among youth and migrant workers (domestic and foreign). Importantly, they resulted in complex disruptions of food supplies, reducing the incomes of small-scale food producers. Lockdowns resulted in school closures, which in turn deprived millions of children from poor families of much needed midday meals for children. The availability, adequacy, and accessibility of food was a glaring issue for rural landless, urban poor, slum dwellers, informal sector, and migrant workers who do not have the means to produce food and lost incomes to purchase it. In Pakistan the sale of sacrificial animals during Eid-ul-Azha fell drastically having a very nega-

tive impact on livelihood of small and landless farmers.

The COVID-19 crisis has created particular hardships, challenges and risks for women. Regardless of official statistics, women constitute at least 50% of Asia’s work-force, if one considers agriculture, fisheries, pastoral, forest, domestic, sub-contracted other ‘informal’ work, and employment in the formal sector. Women are responsible for family and community reproductive work, which includes managing household finances, feeding the family, caring for children, elderly and the sick, and maintaining the social fabric. The unfolding economic fall-out of the pandemic has increased the burden of women’s care work, stress to find new means of income and social pressures. Women garment workers in Cambodia whose work hours and wages have been cut back and whose incomes are necessary to repay family debts, are taking on extremely risky ‘escort’ and entertainment work. In Pakistan, in the early days of the lock down, rural women dairy farmers a vast majority of whom are small and landless farmers, were unable to sell milk and lost much needed income; in the ensuing months they continue to lose income as milk prices plummeted due to slow down of economic activity. Women who were supplying cooked foods and savories in the market have lost all savings and are unable to continue their small-scale enterprises. Landless households are facing increasing hunger with many reverting to one meal a day.

Despite rhetoric about support to vulnerable and marginalized groups, actual governmental support to workers, peasants, fishers, indigenous peoples, and vulnerable and marginalized populations has been meagre, insufficient and difficult to access because of onerous bureaucratic procedures and requirements. In the guise of economic recovery, many governments have enacted laws and are aggressively proceeding economic plans that favour corporations and their own political interests, with little or no targeted support for local economic and food systems actors and working classes. The Cambodian Government’s special programme to support farmers through loans which even if “low-interest,” will not benefit small-scale producers already trapped in debt cycles and in danger of losing their lands as collaterals for additional loans taken to repay old debts. The Indian Government has loosened environmental regulation and labour protection as incentives to corporate investors, allowed infrastructure and mining in ecologically sensitive areas, and passed laws that will undermine the capacities and rights of small-scale food producers (see India box and case study). The Philippines Government continues to push mining and its Build Build Build infrastructure programme and corporate bail-out packages.

The pandemic is far from over, and its full range of impacts need to be monitored regularly at multiple levels through coordinated, systemic approaches, with special attention to testimonies from populations whose voices are too often ignored in policy making, especially women.

71 RDAB to provide special loans to boost farming. https://www.khmertimeskh.com/744412/rdab-to-provide-special-loans-to-boost-farming/
Erosion of Human Rights and Democracy

Many Asian governments seek to control public discourse about the COVID-19 crisis and have taken advantage of the pandemic to cement authoritarian rule and erode human rights. Emergency powers invoked by governments—ostensibly to control the pandemic—allow them to control all aspects of governance, administration, and security with no democratic oversight. While the fine print may vary across countries, these emergency powers share many dangerous commonalities: full control over financial allocations; power to authorize the use of deadly force through police and military; unlimited surveillance of telecommunications; control of conventional and social media and press; restrictions on freedom of speech, movement, and assembly; unfettered powers to put in place any measures considered necessary in a state of emergency; suspension of constitutional rights, freedoms and due processes of justice; and the authority to determine the period of emergency.

The shrinking of democratic spaces and oversight, violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, muzzling of press and media, criminalization of dissent, and political persecution of members of particular communities/religions—all of these were already on the rise before COVID-19 hit. In the pandemic period, they are justified through the pretext of “protecting the public.” In China, Thailand, Myanmar, Philippines, India, Cambodia, and Indonesia, doctors, nurses, health workers, researchers, journalists, lawyers, bloggers, and social media users have been penalized for sharing information about local/national conditions and/or questioning government measures/actions on the grounds that they are “spreading fake news” and “creating panic and unrest.” Equally alarming are the growing waves of prejudice and social discrimination against particular religious and ethnic communities, genders, working classes and indigenous peoples, holding them responsible for the spread of the virus and disease.

Responses by social movements

In the face of these challenges, organisations of small-scale food producers, workers, indigenous peoples, women, healthcare providers, civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights advocates joined hands with local service providers and government bodies to organize responses to meet immediate-intermediate food, nutrition, healthcare and economic needs; mobilize and advocate for the defense of human rights, and; develop policy proposals for progressive systems transformations. While the responses have been diverse and context specific, they are based on and reflect important underlying principles: mutual aid, reciprocity and solidarity; redistribution, equality and justice; agency and autonomy; social relationships, commons and the public realm; land, resource and subsistence security, and; human, animal and eco-system health.

Small-scale food producers, cooperatives, businesses and consumers have started and/or reinvigorated community farms/gardens, community supported agriculture and fisheries, local markets, and direct sales and deliveries to consumers. In India, Thailand and Philippines, workers’ organisations and CSOs have collected donations through direct public appeals, and set up community kitchens and deliveries of food and basic necessities to poor households. This has been especially important for children, elderly, and destitute people. They have organized community-led relief programs in order to address the socio-economic impacts of the lockdown: for e.g. the Tri-Peoples’ Organization Against Disasters Foundation (TRIPOD)—a group of indigenous peoples, Bangsamoro, and migrants in Mindanao organized Kusina Bayanihan or “Community Solidarity Kitchens” in conflict-affected areas in Mindanao.

Cooperatively organized efforts include supplemental and alternative livelihoods, training on agroecology and home gardening, restoring watersheds to ensure regular water supply, forest and eco-system protection, community based health education, monitoring, protection and treatment measures, and strengthening local governance to ensure accurate information gathering and sharing, preventing social discrimination and ensuring timely responses to problems. In many rural areas, people have revived barter across communi-

76 Ibid.
ties/sectors to meet their needs: for e.g., rice-for-fish exchange schemes between farmers and fisherfolk in Thailand; rice and millets for vegetables, corn (for cattle feed) for milk, rice husk (for fish feed) for fish in India; bartering consumer goods for food in the Philippines through online platforms (set up by individuals, not corporations); food and rice exchanges in Cambodia.

Despite laws prohibiting large gatherings and marches, people across the region have organized to demand social-economic justice, public health and other supports for food producers and workers, and the halting discrimination, violence and human rights abuses. Frontline health workers and public health movements have advocated for adequate and timely salaries, hazard pay, PPEs and necessary protections for frontline health personnel and community outreach workers, as well as free COVID-19 testing and treatment for the working classes and poor.

Workers and peasant unions in India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Philippines, Indonesia and Cambodia have organised general strikes and demonstrations demanding decent work, living wages and workers protection; equitable distribution of land especially for landless farmers; reversing privatization of agricultural procurement and public goods/services, rescinding of pro-corporate agriculture, environmental and economic policies and laws; debt cancellation; and an end to violence against women, repressive laws and human rights abuses. Protesters have laid the blame of the terrible atrocities faced by them as a result of COVID-19 on decades of neoliberal policies that have forcefully implemented deregulation, privatization and liberalization. Organisations of forest communities in India have organized and demanded secure forest land rights, education and healthcare facilities for forest communities, government procurement of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and the extension of rural employment schemes for returning migrant workers. Affected communities have organized to block land-grabbing, mining, deforestation and weakening of environmental regulations in India, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Policy proposals
Policy proposals from across the region include putting in place immediate/intermedi-
In the Philippines, indigenous peoples have proposed Sulagad, to promote the indigenous system and practice of agroecology, food sovereignty, traditional knowledge, living in harmony with nature and governance.84 85 86

Europe

The Covid-19 pandemic took the whole continent by surprise. The crisis exposed the unpreparedness of European countries to address such a crisis and its knock-on impacts, not the least by the desperate lack of policy coordination. The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the European food systems revealed critical structural dependencies and weaknesses and triggered further debates about the need to transform its food systems to make them more resilient and sustainable.

Vulnerability of the European food system

Governments and the public were swift to recognize the essential role of food producers since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, given their role to provide essential goods. However the COVID-19 crisis has revealed the limits of the European food system: its long supply chains, dependency on migrant labor forces, excessive power concentration, export dependency, putting in stark contrast the vested interests of the corporate sector and the failures to feed adequately its population and preserve the planet (ECVC). Peasants and other small scale food producers are being praised for their front line contribution to respond to the social and health emergency, as producers of healthy food, the primary need of the population, and to the climatic and ecological emergency, as a major manager of the planet’s ecosystems (Confédération Paysanne).

But the crisis also revealed that after decades of policies to render European food production competitive, this was done at the expense of investing in food producers. Food producers are old, and the generational renewal remains just an aspiration. With a third of them reaching the age of 65 years or older, and more than half of them 55 or older87, the very front liners are part of the ageing population most at risk.

Heavy reliance on migrant workers

COVID-19 dramatically showed that food production now relies heavily on migrant workers, often in conditions of irregularity and exploitation (ECVC, IUF, Agri-Food Systems and Migrant Workers). Blocking their mobility by lockdown measures put entire long-distance food chains at risk. Governments were forced to urgently adopt measures to facilitate mobility and recruitment of seasonal migrant workers. These included mobilizing charter flights to bring workers to the fields, warehouses, processing industry, often ignoring the prevention measures for contamination. Other solutions were taken in Spain or Italy such as the temporary regularization schemes of undocumented migrants. All over Europe governments support schemes to ensure that agricultural workers from Eastern and Central Europe, from Northern Africa, even from Thailand could harvest asparagus or strawberry, grow vegetables, pick berries or work in Europe’s slaughterhouses. Other initiatives by employers and governments to encourage the rising number of unemployed to work as agricultural laborer largely failed. After decades of neo-liberal policies, the so-called competitiveness of the European agriculture has shown to be built on hardship, high flexibility, low wages and sub-standard working conditions.

The pandemic has further exacerbated these trends, with increased precariousness and vulnerability of many workers employed in the agri-food system, especially migrant workers (Ecooruralis in Roumenia). In Germany or the Netherlands, there have been increasing com-

---

84 https://focusweb.org/video/sulagad-our-life-our-future/
85 https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Call/NGOs/CoallationNGOinputs2.docx
complaints by migrant farmworkers concerning wage deductions, housing conditions and violations of their rights. In some contexts, such as in Spain, the decrease in seasonal workers has resulted in harder and more abusive working conditions. In Italy, a lack of labor inspections due to pandemic prevention measures has contributed to increasing recourse to irregular migrant laborer’s working in exploitative conditions, who have offset the labor shortage of Eastern European workers.

Very few companies in warehouses and processing industries have provided farmworkers with masks or other types of safety equipment and information. The meat processing industry has emerged as an epicenter of Covid-19 infections in several countries. Migrant seasonal workers, whose contract expired, were blocked and could not return home.

Market failures
The additional pressure on the agri-food systems due to the closure of restaurants, hospitals, schools, and other cantines, has revealed the fragility of long distance agri-food chains based on cheap prices and structural overproduction. This resulted in even more food losses and waste, tumbling prices in sectors like dairy or meat. On 22 April the European Commission adopted a package of measures providing a total of €80 million of support for the agricultural and livestock sector, including €30 million euros for the dairy sector. In the latter, financial support will come in the form of the private storage of skimmed milk powder, butter and cheese. Rather than taking measures to adapt the supply to the lower demand, the support to private storage will maintain the downward pressure on prices for the coming months, much to the benefit of the agro-industry and at the detriment of producers’ incomes.

Increasing food insecurity
The COVID crisis has strongly highlighted the increase in food insecurity in Europe. As a result of the economic recession, “new poor” have joined the ranks of those for whom the right to adequate food is not being realized. Only in France, the government is warning that up to eight million people in France might need food aid by the end of the year. In the UK, more than a million children normally depend on school meals but are now sheltered at home with parents who may not have work.

Many private and public initiatives were taken to ensure access to food for those in need, but many remained short term solutions. Years of austerity policies weakened social policies and demonstrated the need in Europe policies for policies to realize the right to adequate food.

Inadequate responses to the right to food
The absence of school meals impacts not only the children in need, but more broadly their whole family, who had to spend more money for food when income is lacking. In Belgium, the people dependent on food aid, was expected to raise from 450,000 to 650,000 persons, with new poor (job students, informal workers, self-employed, temporary jobless).

Different private initiatives were taken to ensure agile and quick responses for ensuring basic access to food. But soon it was clear that the charitable approach to food aid had to be replaced by a more sustainable measures of income support. Rather than relying on a fragile system based on unsold goods, donations, volunteers and “good will”, addressing inequalities and precarity needs to put back at the center of concerns. While waiting for the increase of the social minima, food vouchers were seen as an effective means, as was done in Italy. Other governments have worked to redistribute food. Due to disruptions along the food supply chain caused by border controls and restaurant closures, the industry has had to cope with piles of food that could go to waste. The British government, for example, offered £3.25 million for food redistribution organizations across England to help them cut food waste and redistribute up to 14,000 tons of food.
tons of surplus stock.91 Social protection measures were adopted in most European States, granting the needed social assistance to those who lost their income. Other measures allowing delays in payments of rent, debts or taxes, supported millions to withstand the crisis. The strict rules of financial and budgetary discipline were abandoned partially to alleviate social distress (but also for bailouts to large industrial sector). But given the scale of the crisis the universal coverage remains a big concern.

Different examples show that the food distributed is not nutritiously adequate and that the most vulnerable might end up malnourished and potentially with other health risks. Sales data from the first months of the crisis show that Europeans in various countries stocked up on processed food over fresh fruit and vegetables. In Madrid a national government-funded program even distributed meals to students through a Spanish fast-food company, with menu items ranging from chicken burgers to pizza.92 After protest this has been stopped.

**Public debate**

The local territorial food systems in Europe proved to be resilient93. The models of social economy such as the CSA, booming local purchases, solidarity initiatives between communities and producers confirmed the social and economic resilience of local territorial food systems based on mutual solidarity and strong sense of common endeavor. Most farms engaged in social and territorial economy were mostly unaffected by the crisis. They even had to respond to increased demand, while confronting difficulties to extend land under cultivation. Solidarity took varied forms, from provision of protective material and information on health prevention, the development of digital tools, financial facilities to producers, volunteer work on the farm, food distribution to people in need... In the Spanish context, COAG, together with a group of small businesses, have demonstrated the critical role proximity markets play in maintaining rural economy, basic services and combat depopulation of rural areas. It responded to local needs during the crisis, despite the very strong competition from large digital platforms. (COAG, May 25). A German member of a CSA group said: “There ain’t no certainty about exactly when I’ll get how many gram of which product, but the security that my CSA will provide me food.” Public, media, local authorities recognized the critical role of small-scale food producers in the food supply. Without them, the basic need for food is at risk.

Governments have taken support measures, but these were mainly aimed at addressing short term labor and food shortages. This resulted in strengthening large retailers, agri-food industry and logistic platforms (Confédération Paysanne, MODEF, ABL, ECVC) with little attention to support and develop more sustainable agri-food systems. A public debate about the need for transforming the European food system became more intense. For agribusiness, the crisis is a pretext to delay the implementation of the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies presented by the European Commission, as part of the EU Green Deal, including the reduction in use of fertilizer, pesticides and antibiotic use94, arguing that it would affect productivity and undermining competitiveness. On the other hand, many voices and coalitions of producers, consumers, public health workers, trade unions, NGOs were heard calling for the need to remedy the shortcomings of the food system and to reform in depth, with more ambitious public policies aimed at an agro-ecological and territorial transition.

---

92 Malgesini from the Spanish EAPN
**Policy responses**

In the context of reintroducing border controls and limiting the free movement of people in the EU, the European Commission launched its Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies setting the basis for transforming its food system to make it fair, healthy, and environmental-friendly. Taking stock of learning from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Commission will also develop a **contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security**. The EU will support the global transition to sustainable agri-food systems through its trade policies and international cooperation instruments. Organizations demand:

- **Ensure that current financial support measures prioritize protection of the poor and vulnerable and assess the impact** – through a comprehensive assessment on who is impacted worse and by proposing solutions to reduce poverty, inequality, gender and discrimination gap together with the groups themselves.

- **Give priority to participation and democracy**. Creating meaningful dialogue with people experiencing poverty, small scale food producers and Civil Society Organizations. Enforce EU acquis regarding rule of law and democracy, defending CSOs freedom of voice and action.

- **Reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy on the principles of Food Sovereignty**

- **Stop the negotiation of new Free Trade Agreements.**

- **Manage and regulate the common internal market** and the production model, in order to stop the relocation of food production to other countries to reduce costs, without caring about production methods or the serious health, environmental and social consequences that it generates in those countries and in the EU itself.

- **Put an end to competition and social, health and environmental dumping** that affects farmers in the EU, which drives forward the development of industrial agriculture and the loss of millions of small and medium farmers.

- **Create an environmentally sustainable and democratic CAP and food chain**, with coherent policies aimed at fulfilling the ambition of the Commission’s Green Deal.

- **Bring farmers and consumers closer together and relocate food consumption**, to prioritise the needs of farmers and citizens including through public purchases and support for local territorial marketing and distribution networks, rather than the profits of transnational companies, WTO agreements and Free Trade Agreements.

- **Protect the rights of agricultural workers** and link CAP support for producers to the fulfilment of these rights.

- **Adopt an ambitious legally binding instrument ensuring joint liability throughout the whole subcontracting chain for labour rights** also for cross-border and seasonal migrant workers to tackle wage dumping and collective bargaining dumping.

- **Adopt an ambitious and binding human rights due diligence legislation** to ensure the full respect and enforcement of human rights, including workers’ and trade union rights, in companies’ activities as well as throughout their subcontracting and supply chains and franchise systems, at national and cross borders level.

- **Reject austerity** in Europe and progress towards a macroeconomic framework that prioritises the fight against poverty and inequality. This can only be done with fair redistribution measures that reduce inequality between the wealthy and the poor. Impose taxation that makes wealthier businesses and individuals help pay the costs of rescue and recovery packages.
Latin America

Impacts
The document "The systemic response to the pandemic: Profits, privileges, control and repression" by Alianza Biodiversidad is a critical account of the impacts of Covid-19 on subsistence, food, health, income, housing, water, and the environment in various Latin American countries. We learn from it that the Covid-19 pandemic has provided Latin America with a new legal framework for restricting mobility, legalizing the loss of work rights, creating new taxes, privatizing public resources and common goods, compulsory use of digital platforms even where there is no infrastructure; new waves of subsidies to agro-industry, and increasing the power of repressive bodies.

Support for agro-industry, for the export of commodities, became a priority with Covid-19 in Latin America. With the argument that it is the corporations that produce the food and their operation cannot be stopped, laws have been changed or created that favor the food industry and sacrifice workers, since agro-industrial activity was reclassified as essential. There is abundant testimony of employer abuses against farm workers, packers, and migrant workers, always in the context of agro-industry or the export of commodities.

The case of transgenics is clear and alarming. The Network for a Transgenic-Free Latin America (Red por Una América Latina Libre de Transgénicos) has a report. The industry is proposing the deregulation of transgenic seeds in countries where they were under moratoria. GMO corporations consider that in conditions of confinement it will be more difficult to plan a coordinated opposition. In addition, there may be a greater openness of society to accept them, due to the sensitivity that a food crisis would generate.

In Bolivia, the National Biosafety Committee was authorized to establish abbreviated procedures for the evaluation of transgenic genetic material from maize, sugarcane, cotton, wheat and new types of transgenic soybeans, justified in the context of the Covid-19 health emergency, given the need to obtain food in less time and with higher yields. This measure will not provide food, since these are crops destined for export agribusiness, and will rather will endanger local food sovereignty and health of the Bolivian people.

In Chile, the Agricultural and Livestock Service is proposing new regulations to open the door to new uses for transgenic seeds, such as the production of biotechnology products for the domestic market. Chile would go from being a producer of transgenic seeds for off-season export, to being a producer of transgenic crops, with all the impacts on the country’s health, environment and nature.

Perú. Peru’s National Institute of Agrarian Innovation intends to facilitate the release of transgenic crops, which were banned until the creation of regulations to be drawn up in 2021, taking advantage of the current emergency situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and with questionable haste.

Cuba. A few weeks ago, Cuba approved a package of regulations that enable the entry of transgenics into Cuban agriculture, to facilitate ‘the orderly and controlled use of GMOs in agricultural development programs, as one more alternative to increase productivity and the delivery of food to the population’.

95 Published in http://www.biodiversidadla.org/Documentos/Ataques-politicas-resistencias-relatos-105
96 Pandemia, transgénicos y Doctrina del shock, por Elizabeth Bravo. http://www.biodiversidadla.org/Recategorizar/Pandemia-transgenicos-y-Doctrina-del-Shock
97 Ibid.
**Invasion of digital technologies.**

We see an enormous advance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and others that depend on satellites and wireless frequencies, which make possible the automation of productive and communicative processes. These technologies are praised for their ability to maintain "healthy distance" (transferring the risk of contagion to home delivery workers), to continue making productive use of work time at home, and to mechanize agricultural and industrial processing tasks. Many people do not understand the "digital trap", and many young people - when they imagine alternatives - just want to invent new software or new applications. "Remote management" is being promoted as the new green and contagious alternative.

**Situation of refugees and immigrants.**

In July alone, more than 100,000 Latin American immigrants in transit to the United States were being detained or deported from the immigration stations in southern Mexico, without considering the closing of borders or the vulnerability of families crowded into shelters. There are no records of the migrants killed by Covid-19. In the busiest migratory crossings in Latin America (Guatemala-Mexico and the Rio Bravo), where the levels of contagion are the highest, those repatriated or deported travel alone. When they arrive in their home countries they are in emotional shock and 80% of the shelters are closed. However, remittances from Mexican workers in the United States have increased by up to 7 percent in the last three months, showing the sacrifice and love that migrants have for their families.

**Lack of information.**

In different locations, there is a lack of adequate public information to ensure participation and social control. Even health data on how to deal with COVID-19 is unreliable, including data systems that can contribute to access by the most affected population groups. In Bogotá, a dramatic scene, the population used red cloths to indicate who needed material support.

**Community responses**

Many of the initiatives observed refer to the articulation between rural areas, city and forest dwellers. Practices of procurement practices from small-scale producers and donations to vulnerable families received much support among social movements, popular organizations, unions, religious communities and volunteers. However, more and more indigenous, peasant and local communities depend on money for their food, and this is a growing problem. There are renewed intentions to promote agroecology, but the definitions that different actors have in mind are very diverse. There is a discursive dispute over how public policies should understand and provide support to as agroecological projects.

With the use of digital media, people were able to have more contact with the rights violations perpetrated in this period by governments and corporations, and also by the justice system itself, which contributed greatly to the impact and political pressure.

Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, the situation of women who suffer domestic violence, and people who are victims of structural racism has been crucial in providing visibility to popular agendas and in showing how the pandemic brings more negative impacts to specific population groups, contributing to hunger and nutritional insecurity.

**Public policy proposals**

- Defense of democracy, rights and popular power;
- Adoption of sustainable and healthy food systems with the dynamism of the relations between rural areas, city and forest dwellers;
- Strengthening social protection programs, improving working conditions and guaranteeing basic income;
- Access and permanence of land and balanced use of natural resources. Immediate interruption of government measures that make available the natural assets of humanity for the exploitation of corporations;
- Expansion of public procurement programs, such as school meals and food purchases from small family farmers;
- Guarantee technical assistance to rural agro-ecological and peasant groups;
- Strengthening the network of public equipment for agriculture, food and nutrition, restoring its social function (e.g., free fairs, public markets, popular restaurants, community kitchens, decentralized public warehouses, food and seed banks, etc.);
- Strengthening popular food and nutrition...
education programs and services.

- Respect and support community procedures to mitigate the pandemic (health filters and traditional therapy measures).
- We have also learned from the community initiatives in response to Covid-19 that it is necessary to act on the emergency by building structural perspectives that focus on the causes of the problems and that can contribute to the establishment of healthy and sustainable food systems. Below we recall the considerations made by the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement and Via Campesina. 98

- Food Sovereignty to guarantee food, and therefore the forms of organization to produce food for each people. And that is why trade should only be with surpluses. No country in the world should leave its population dependent on production in other countries.
- Agro-ecology must be defended as the only productive matrix needed to produce healthy food. And agroecology needs a “marriage” with popular and peasant knowledge and scientific knowledge.
- The development of cooperatives to bring food to the cities, to store winter or summer food, to develop agro-industry is fundamental. The problem is that today the big monopolies own the industries and control the market. Developing of cooperatives focused on rural produce.
- The State has to change its function towards public policies for development, production, and food purchases.
- More energy must be put into the development of research at the service of peasants.
- Education in the rural areas (ensure that there are schools in all communities). Only knowledge truly liberates people. Knowledge comes from the school, from the family, from the community, but the systematization of knowledge comes from the school.

Some testimonies of the impacts of the pandemic

Honduras turned into a toxic waste dump. The Congress of the Republic approved a decree, last June 16th, that contains the interpretation of articles numbers 8, 11, 68 second paragraph, 69 and 92 literal c) of the General Law of the Environment, which refers to the import, manufacture and/or recycling of used batteries from other countries. With this decree, the introduction of used lead batteries is allowed, turning our country into a toxic waste dump, arguing that the funds obtained will serve to address the crisis of COVID 19.


Argentina and the facilitation of the use of agrochemicals. In particular, one measure that has been approved at the Mercosur level has been the facilitation of the use of agrochemicals - through three economic complementation agreements that have been put into effect in Mercosur: the reduction of intra-zone tariffs for the import of inputs to manufacture herbicides and synthetic fibers was approved. In relation to herbicides, the agreements cover chemical compounds used for the manufacture of pesticides and herbicides, monoisopropylamine and its salts and dimethylamine used to produce glyphosate and 2,4 D. Toxic agro-chemical spraying continued at an alarming rate during all the months of quarantine. On March 31, more than 100 organizations in Argentina reported that “During these days of isolation there have been “incidents” with fumigations in Santiago del Estero, Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Entre Rios or Chaco; in those areas where commodity production is carried out there seems to be a free path to fumigate (us). This is not new, it is the tragic daily life of the Fumigated Peoples of our country, where every year around 500 million kilos/litres of agrotoxins are released in thousands of commercial formulations and with active principles prohibited in a large part of the world without any control, and in breach of the General Environmental Law No. 25,675”.

Carlos Vicente GRAIN,
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Agribusiness abuse in Costa Rica. In Costa Rica, coffee, pineapple, yucca and other commodities and cash crops have rebounded in their exports in the midst of the crisis. Sanitary measures for the entry and exit of truck drivers throughout the isthmus, who had to be tested for COVID-19 and quarantined if they tested positive, were fiercely combated by the same Costa Rican agro-exporters agreed upon by the Central American and Panamanian governments in order to avoid “the slowness of

98 Disponible en: https://viacampesina.org/es/la-refor-
ma-agraria-en-la-actualidad-y-nuestros-desafios-nos-he-
mos-comprometido-con-la-comida-sana/
VOICES FROM THE GROUND: from COVID-19 to radical transformation of our food systems

Introduction

COVID-19 caused a multitude of food systems-wide shocks, starting with food insecurity at individual and family level, to outbreaks in food processing and meat packing plants to disruptions in farm operations as well as to food supply chains in North America. In the United States, this happened against the background of Trump administration cutting $4.5 billion in 2019 in Supplementary Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, commonly called “food stamps,” over five years.

Black and Indigenous communities and people of color (BIPOC) have suffered disproportionately high incidences of hospitalization and death from COVID-19 (CDC, 2020), especially those employed in essential sectors. Canada is not tracking the data by race, as yet, but Ontario (Canada’s most populous province) shows the same pattern of disproportionate harm in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. Food system workers have especially been vulnerable to COVID-19. As officials warned about food supply shortages, meat-packing facilities became major centers of COVID-19 outbreaks, focusing attention on the workers at these facilities, a majority of whom are immigrants and refugees. According to data collected by the Food & Environment Reporting Network (FERN), as of September 25: “At least 809 meatpacking and food processing plants (498 meatpacking and 311 food processing) and 124 farms and production facilities in the United States have had confirmed cases of COVID-19. At least 60,524 workers (43,100 meatpacking workers, 9,706 food processing workers, and 7,718 farmworkers) have tested positive for COVID-19 and at least 258 workers (206 meatpacking workers, 35 food processing workers, and 17 farmworkers) have died.”

North America

- National Farmers Union (Canada): “Excessive concentration of ownership and centralization of beef processing, supported and encouraged by our federal and provincial governments, has now put the health of workers, the beef supply and the livelihoods of thousands of farmers in jeopardy.”

- National Family farm Coalition (USA): “What is clear is that no farmer should lose their farm and no fisherman should lose their boat because of the crisis sparked by COVID-19. Farm, fish and food workers should likewise not lose their livelihoods.”

99 https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2020/06/22/rj-tem-maior-numero-de-mortes-por-policiais-em-22-anos-e-o-menor-indice-de-homicidios-ja-registrado-pelo-isp.ghtml
101 https://forumseguranca.org.br/publicacoes_posts/violencia-domestica-durante-pandemia-de-covid-19/
A. Food System Impacts

1. Food Security and the Right to Food
According to Food Secure Canada, 4.4 million Canadians were food insecure before the pandemic. Food insecurity in Indigenous and racialized households is already two to three times the national average. In the United States, pre-pandemic, more than 37 million Americans (11 million of them children) struggled with hunger, according to Feeding America (a US NGO). Due to the pandemic, that number has skyrocketed with more than 54 million Americans, or 1 in 6, projected to face hunger as the pandemic continues; they project that on current trends U.S. food banks will provide 6 billion (6,000,000,000) meals to Americans this year, of which more than a third, over 18 million are children.

With the disproportionately high COVID-19 incidences among Black, Hispanic, Indigenous and those headed by single women (BIPOC) communities, the pandemic has exacerbated their vulnerabilities: More than 20 percent of Black and Latin families reported they did not have enough to eat, which is double the rate of whites. Women, who were more likely to have lost their jobs, also reported higher rates of hunger.

According to a new report commissioned by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), as of July, the number of people who said they sometimes or often did not have enough to eat has skyrocketed to 29 million, or 11 percent of adults in the United States.

2. Food Production, Processing and Retail
In the United States, farmers, ranchers, fishermen and all food producers, were already struggling to make ends meet prior to the COVID-19 crisis. They are now facing new threats to their production and markets sparked by COVID-19.

Farmworkers face a daunting series of threats related to COVID-19, according to a number of farmworker organizations. These include lack of access to health care and the closing of borders and suspension of new applicants for the H2 agricultural worker program, viewed as essential for the produce industry. Many farmworkers are not eligible for unemployment benefits, and while disaster and trade-related aid has gone to farmers, it has not gone to farmworkers who are also directly affected. IATP observes.

According the UFCW, which represents workers in grocery and other frontline industries, frontline workers continue to be at risk. Among the union's members, there have been at least 105 grocery worker deaths and at least 15,484 grocery workers infected or exposed to the virus. Initially, some employers increased wages and benefits to match food workers' essential status in an effort to maintain productivity (e.g. UFCW, 2020).

Some 5.3 million restaurant jobs alone were lost in April, according to the Labor Department, while One Fair Wage estimates the number lost to date as high as 9.5 million. Intersections of race and class make BIPOC communities especially vulnerable. Nearly one in six New York City jobs lost due to the pandemic was held by an undocumented worker, who is not eligible for unemployment insurance, a stimulus check, and, in most cases, SNAP benefits. In late April workers deemed 'essential' in Iowa were told that they would be denied unemployment benefits if they refused to go back to work when called, even if they were concerned about contracting the coronavirus.

In Canada too, prices dropped for farmers but increased for consumers – the distribution system was taking a hit, and the economically least powerful suffered the consequences. When the meat-packing plants closed, the immediate impact was that livestock farmers lost their primary channel for market access. A lot of animals were killed and disposed of. According to market analysis service Canfax, cattle prices hit their lowest prices since October 2013; Canadian Cattlemen’s association estimates beef industry revenue losses higher than $500 million by end of June 2020. Cargill’s plant in High River, Alberta which processes about 36% of Canadian beef had to close temporarily in April with 484 cases of COVID-19 linked to the plant, including 360 workers. One worker died.

Canada admits about 60,000 seasonal agricultural and other temporary workers each year to work on fruit, vegetable and other farms. In 2019, 58,800 people came to Canada to work in the agriculture sector as migrant workers. The total decreased by about 17 per cent nationwide in 2020 due to the pandemic. In Brit-
ish Columbia this year, there were 39 per cent fewer workers in the province as of August, compared to the same period in 2019. In June, in Canada, every major supermarket chain announced an end to the COVID-19 pay supplement for their workers. Workplace safety remained largely at the discretion of employers, and in many food production and processing sectors, workers are prevented from organizing collectively to protect their rights. Complaints about the lack of access to personal protective equipment and paid sick leave to be able to stay home if they developed symptoms of COVID-19 are common (ILO, 2020).

For the people who pay close attention to the national food supply chain, empty shelves aren't that big or scary a problem. The more complicated problems are expected in the near future, as the system encounters bottlenecks in production caused by potential labour shortages at farms or virus outbreaks at processing plants.

### 3. Food Waste

Dumping of food due to excess supply has been a major fall-out of COVID-19 in north America. In the United States, the closing of schools (which accounted for 7% of the fluid milk consumed in the U.S.) and restaurants (major cheese purchasers) eliminated two important markets for dairy. In early April, farmers were dumping 3.7 million gallons of milk each day, draining it into manure pits, the New York Times reported in early May 2020. Dairy farmers in the United States are already caught in a multi-year price slump, and the US saw the loss of 3,200 mostly small to mid-sized dairy farms last year. COVID-19 closures have reduced demand for dairy in Canada as well. Dairy Farmers of Ontario (which sets production quotas) has ordered farmers to dump surplus milk. Supply chain bottlenecks mean farmers are having a hard time getting products to shelf. Reduced processing capacity has prompted some farmers in eastern Canada to euthanize hogs; Canada typically loses from 5 to 7% of its farms every year. COVID-19 could double that loss this year—perhaps more.

North Americans spend roughly half their food budget on food service in some form (restaurants, etc.), and half on food they cook and eat at home (buying primarily from supermarkets). COVID-19 shut down the service half of the food system, creating a number of choke points in the distribution line, and particular problems for foods (e.g. sea food) that are more often eaten out. At the same time, the distribution system, struggled to redirect the food that was newly in demand. One simple example: flour and yeast were difficult to obtain for a few months, because there were not enough 1kg, 2kg and 5kg bags, or smaller yeast packets for the demand from home bakers in a system that was used to delivering much larger quantities to restaurants and bakeries.

All of this has revealed the fragility of long distance agri-food chains based on cheap prices and structural overproduction, and the need for building resilient food systems that are not only equitable, but also is centered on sustainable production, processing, distribution and consumption practices.

### B. Responses

#### 1. Private Charitable Food Aid in the United States

In North America the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a massive expansion of food charities. However, the private charitable emergency feeding system in the U.S.—the largest and most sophisticated in the world—has historically never been able to meet the demand or make a real dent in the rate of food insecurity which has hovered between 11 - 12% over the past 30 years. It is simply not possible to ‘food-bank’ our way out of hunger. COVID-19 has brought us to the proverbial crossroads. Such consequences are exposing the true extent – and root causes – of the hunger problem in rich-but-unequal countries, such as the U.S. Demand for food banks surged in Canada too, when the pandemic hit. The increased support to local food banks and food provision is indeed needed/great, of course, but that keeps the food system running on business as usual. According to PROOF (a University-of Toronto affiliated institute monitoring hunger in Canada), a basic income, not expanded food charity, is critical as the pandemic plunges more Canadians into deprivation.

#### 2. Response by State/ Government

In March 2020 the U.S. federal government passed a historic $2.2 trillion economic stimulus bill (the CARES Act) which included a new program related to food systems called the
Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), and consists broadly of two initiatives: the USDA Farm to Families Food Box initiative, and a direct payments system for producers. The CFAP direct payment program aimed to partially offset producer economic losses in the first quarter of 2020 for eligible commodities that had seen a significant drop in market prices, based on formula that differed depending on the commodity. As value-chain disruptions severely impacted producers particularly in highly concentrated sectors such as livestock and dairy, these payments helped many producers cover basic household and operation costs in a period of historically high levels of farmer debt in the U.S. But the CFAP has also received significant criticism from small and mid-scale producer organizations and civil society for a number of failures. For example it has been pointed out that ‘the $9.5 billion for livestock producers in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) […] is less about the immediate COVID-19 economic impacts than about rescuing the meatpacker dominated beef supply chain.’ It is argued that ‘the COVID-19 rescue package offers USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue another taxpayer funded means to make Big Ag bigger and force out the smaller producers he derides into the rising tide of farm bankruptcies and farm mortgage foreclosures.’

The overall outcome of CFAP is that smaller-scale and highly diversified farms have received few economic benefits from the program, and many did not apply at all due to the time investment need to apply with little prospect for economic relief.

3. Mutual Aid/ Solidarity Economy

In ‘What Mutual Aid Can Do During a Pandemic’, The New Yorker (May 18, 2020) covered several examples of the immediate outpouring of self-organized voluntarism in America. According to Stanford Social Innovation Review, many pathways toward a better world are being laid bare, with COVID-19 sharpening our awareness, and by the altruistic mutual aid efforts arising across the globe.

These locally designed and collaboratively built acts of solidarity—which view the vulnerable as participants in their survival rather than passive consumers of assistance—inform a model of community resilience and collective empowerment with implications far beyond their immediate impact. They reject responses to the pandemic that value political hegemony and expediency over the well-being of the homeless, victims of domestic violence, people with disabilities and many other marginalized members of society.

Supply chain disruptions have also given rise to creative ways in which farmers are connecting to food banks or other ways of reaching people who need food reducing food-miles. Civil Eats identified an array of programs throughout the United States, some of them long-standing but most of them newly emerged, to help address the 2020 food distribution crisis. Small farms are finding new ways to feed people as the COVID-19 pandemic restricts grocery shopping and squeezes supply chains in Canada. The challenge is to ensure that these practices remain when this crisis comes to an end.

C. Emerging public policy proposals and processes for building more equitable and resilient food systems and defending the right to food and nutrition

1. Public policy Advocacy

In the United States, following significant advocacy by producer organizations and civil society organisations over the course of 2020, the US Department of Agriculture (responsible for implementing CFAP) made some revisions to the CFAP application process that aimed to ease the application process for highly diversified farms, which would allow these farms to receive payments based on total revenue losses (rather than losses by commodity) but this change in the program has not been implemented yet. A number of other draft laws focused on addressing the shortcomings of the CFAP program mentioned above, including direct support for local food systems infrastructure, funding specifically for local food system producers, historically marginalized producers, and diversified operations, as well as debt relief for small-scale farmers have all been introduced in the U.S. Congress but have been opposed by powerful agribusiness interests and have failed so far to be passed into law.

In Canada, on March 19, the National Farmers Union demanded that farmers’ markets be considered an essential service. Physical markets are closed in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan, although some have moved online. Markets are still permitted in limited form in Ontario, British Columbia, Al-
VOICES FROM THE GROUND: from COVID-19 to radical transformation of our food systems

2. Trade and international cooperation
Experts say a decision from 23 countries to not unreasonably restrict trade of agricultural and agri-food products is vital for securing Canada’s food supply. A statement from the World Trade Organization announced that 23 countries, including Canada, Mexico, the United States, China and the European Union, had agreed that measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 would not “adversely” affect trade in agriculture and agri-food products.

3. Studies on increasing food self-reliance
Food Secure Canada: A study published in 2015 showed that replacing 10% of the top 10 fruit and vegetable imports in Ontario with locally grown produce would result in a $250-million increase in provincial gross domestic product and the creation of 3,400 new jobs. If this were done across the country, the impact would be significant. Kwantlen Polytechnic University, B.C.: Food self-reliance has the potential to nearly double all economic indicators over the baseline for export commodity-oriented food systems—that means potentially increasing the GDP by 94%, total economic output by 91%, tax revenue by 99%, total employment by 87%, and household income by 89%.

COVID-19 may bring about thinking and behavioral changes and a move away from the model of industrialized agriculture and factory farming and towards promotion of small scale, local, agroecological models (Lois Ross, rabble.ca, Apr. 21, 2020). FarmFolk CityFolk, B.C.: There is a “radical rise” in support for local food systems. The silver lining of this disruption will be a more robust local food system.

Concerns:
The public (including farmers) are being manipulated by corporations and politicians alike to believe the narrative they want us to believe. Corporate owners control the narrative and they want us to believe workers are a top priority, even though they continue to be treated as expendable. COVID-capitalism is strengthening capacities for agri-food/export infrastructure and helping reduce risks for agribiz, rather than supporting and enhancing the resilience of local farmers/food producers. It is about what needs to be stopped and con-}

strained but also what is working and needs further support.

Conclusion: Farming and food production were recognised as essential activities!

CSM North America network

COVID-19 and Protracted Crises

For communities in protracted crises COVID-19 is yet another layer of crisis, pushing many to the brink of famine and/or collapse. The UN Security Council expressed grave concern about COVID-19 “especially in countries ravaged by armed conflicts, or in post-conflict situations, or affected by humanitarian crises,” yet fighting has continued in almost all contexts. In Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Balochistan pandemic-related movement restrictions combined with periodic fighting is causing lower demand, rising prices, and delays in accessing vital agricultural inputs, resulting in loss of crops.

Disruptions to humanitarian supply chains due to COVID-19 resulted in a 39% decline in imports to Yemen, which already faced blockades to food imports. The country is at even greater risk of famine, with 80% of people reliant on food aid, a 35% increase in food prices since the start of the pandemic, and humanitarian agencies reporting a $1 billion funding shortage. In Uganda the Red Cross was unable to mobilize food for refugees or deliver food already in stock due to airport closures and movement restrictions.

Struggling to recover from multiple natural disasters, remittances to Haiti – which account-
ed for more than 38% of the country’s GDP in 2019 – have dropped substantially since the pandemic hit. Combined with job loss due to lockdowns, many people now afford to eat just one meal a day. Both Syria and Lebanon are in deep economic crises that have worsened with COVID-19. Rapidly depreciating currency led to drops in availability and affordability of food in both countries, with 1.4 million additional people in Syria tipped into food insecurity in the first half of 2020.

Afghan refugees who work as day labourers in Karachi, rely on their employers for daily meals, but have lost both their jobs and these meals due to lockdowns. Rohingya refugees face discrimination both in camps and urban area. Lockdown measures in camps in Bangladesh and India is leading to food shortages, while in Malaysia Rohingya are banned from entering markets, impacts both access to food and livelihoods. Small, donation-reliant social kitchens in Athens, Greece have seen a five-fold increase in demand during the pandemic, as refugees report being sent there by large humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR.

Consistently in protracted crises, and even more so during the pandemic, local agricultural production and short food distribution chains are a saving grace. In Gaza, under occupation and blockade, seeds are distributed along with food aid to encourage home gardens to facilitate access to healthy food in a context where farmers are denied access to their land due pandemic restrictions and those imposed by Israeli forces. In Burkina Faso, peri-urban food producers continued to work in an otherwise disrupted food system by making home deliveries in urban areas when markets were closed due to lockdowns, supporting both farmer livelihoods and the food and nutritional needs of urban communities.

COVID-19 highlights the need to adhere to the CFS Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (FFA), to strengthen local food systems, foster access to markets and natural resources, and ensure the protection of those most affected or at risk.


Digitalization in Food and Agriculture

All along the food chain companies are increasingly turning to Big Data to generate new revenue streams and grow profits. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated this pre-existing trend and exacerbated its potential damage to the land where our food is grown and the meals on our tables.

Dependence on Big Data’s social technologies is facilitating cross-sectoral convergences that were unfeasible at the beginning of the 21st century. Input companies are needing massive processing power to model agrochemical formulations with adequate toxicity to battle ever-evolving “superweeds”. Their scientists want computing super-power to track which genes are active during a seed’s development in order to engineer new varieties. Food retailers want to know who’s shopping, what they’re buying and what they may be persuaded to buy. They also want to encourage, fill and deliver online orders instantly, increasingly reliant on robotics, artificial intelligence and digital payment services. The top experts in “New Retail” are battling for dominance in the grocery market through cross-sectoral relationships and outright ownership. Driverless car technologies, face recognition, drones, imaging and sensing tools, mobile apps and more are coming together on the world’s biggest industrial farms. The global market for artificial intelligence for agriculture is expected to surpass $2 billion by 2024.

Automation is aimed at boosting forms of food production that the pandemic is challenging, such as big agro-industrial operations and...
production of export commodities, to the detriment of the much-needed diversity of vegetables, staples and animals that have been basic to avoid massive hunger during the quarantines. In a corporate executive’s words: “The pandemic bolsters the case for acceleration, we need to ensure that we can produce enough food to feed the population globally. Providing 5G coverage to every stalk of corn is going to require a lot of cell sites, I believe it’s going to take more disruption than how we have done it in the past.”

Through automation in labs, Big Ag has now the capacity to abolish the historic division between agrochemical formulators and fertilizer manufacturers, grain traders and plant breeders, and grocery retailers and tractor manufacturers. The corporate narrative insists that digital technologies is the way to ensure food for all, but 4.0 Agriculture promotes basically a food system that is stripped of all direct human relations with the soil, plants, animals, rivers or the oceans.

These plans for digitalization in food and agriculture require vast amounts of natural resources for erecting data-storage facilities (by 2025, 10 times the storage capacity that exists today will be needed), manufacturing and deploying thousands of kilometers of wires, launching thousands of satellites into the Earth’s atmosphere, mass-producing gadgets, screens, processors. The oil and minerals needed are in the grounds where communities live. Many peoples already suffer eviction, land-grabbing and endless conflicts due to the first, second or third wave of industrialization. The 4th industrial revolution, speeded up by the pandemic, is also speeding up the rate of new hungry and malnourished populations in the planet. Extractive activities have been classified in several Latin American countries as essential. The wave of aggressions against those who truly feed the world is renewed.

ETC Group

3. Conclusions

3.1 Lessons from our constituencies and regions

We stated in the Premise that the COVID-19 crisis must be understood within a whole food systems framework. The testimonies and analyses across all constituencies and regions corroborate the layers of systemic injustices and interconnected vulnerabilities that must be tackled to find our way out of this crisis. In particular, the emergence and devastating impacts of COVID-19 are closely linked to the economic, social and environmental injustices of neoliberal policies and a food system based on intensive, export-oriented agriculture production, global supply chains, market-led food provision, and corporate profit. At country and regional levels, once again we see historical policy choices towards neoliberalism shaping impacts on food systems. The rise of market-based and privatized provision of public goods have baked inequalities into society on which COVID has acted. The COVID-19 crisis cannot be fixed by emergency measures and stimulus packages that perpetuate the same model. It will require a deep reconsideration of the ecological, economic and social conditions and relations inherent in the current system. It makes the need for a transformation of the food system towards food sovereignty, agroecology, based on human rights and justice more urgent than ever.

Never in our lives, never in the history of this region have we experienced such an accumulation of serious, deep, interconnected crises. We need structural solutions! Ibrahima Coulibaly, President of the West African Network of Peasant and Agricultural Producers Organizations - ROPPA.

103 ETC Group, Blocking the Chain, https://www.etcgroup.org/content/blocking-chain
104 Voices from the Ground: How the Global Mining Industry is Profiting from the COVID-19 Pandemic
105 ETC Group, Who Will Feed Us, https://www.etcgroup.org/content/new-video-who-will-feed-us-peasant-food-web-vs-industrial-food-chain
Structural inequalities determine COVID-19 impacts

Communities’ and peoples’ existing exposures to injustices have been strong markers for how acutely they are affected by the COVID-19 crises. Historical discrimination and unfavourable policies have resulted in lack of decent, safe and dignified living conditions for millions. Unjust socio-economic conditions have increased peoples’ vulnerability and exposure to COVID-19. Many peoples were unable to lock down as they were dependant on daily wages, and have neither the financial reserves, nor adequate social protection or state support systems to draw on in times of crises.

Those most deeply affected by the pandemic are those in our constituencies: women, youth, refugees and migrants, workers and small-scale food producers, landless peoples, urban food insecure, and indigenous peoples. Small-scale food producers are overall reporting an increase in cases of expropriation of land and water resources, assassination of social leaders, as well as domestic violence against women. They are facing an increase in social conflicts related to natural resources tenure due to historical dispossession and territorial grabbing. The fact that pastoralists are not allowed to follow their normal seasonal movements is re-igniting conflicts with agriculturalists that had been overcome in the past years.

Our workers constituency point out “Agricultural food workers are considered essential and are treated as expendable”. Most of them have historically bad labour conditions, low wages, are not entitled to social protection and often exposed to sexual harassment and gender discrimination. Many of these workers are also migrants, unable to lockdown at home because they are dependent on daily wages, too far from their home regions and countries, or were forced back into work by employers in unsafe and unfair conditions. COVID-19 has revealed that the so-called competitiveness of the industrial agriculture model is built on hardship, high flexibility of labour, low wages and substandard working conditions as well as environmental and health risks. The structural causes of migration, too, are linked to precariousness of peasant livelihoods created by neoliberal policies and historical injustices such as colonization and persisting social hierarchies.

COVID-19 is also tearing through indigenous populations due to historical marginalization in terms of access to healthcare, and lack of recognition of their rights, and systems of life and livelihoods. One example is indigenous peoples’ fight for their Right to Water. Whether due to the lack of access to drinking water and sanitation services, to contamination from polluting industries, the dispossession of their territories, or the expansion of industrial food production, this lack of the fulfilment of their rights has increased their risks to COVID-19. Historical comorbidities in indigenous (and many other marginalized) populations caused by ultra-processed foods has also been reflected in the higher COVID-19 numbers. Indigenous peoples are custodians of the biodiversity that sustains life and protects us from infectious pathogens, yet their lives are most at risk from industrial plantations, which are also a cause of the current crises.

The UN Secretary General has warned that the COVID-19 crisis has reversed “decades of limited and fragile progress on gender equality and women’s rights” 106. Women’s responsibility for care and social reproductive work, as well as the pre-existing patriarchal power asymmetries resulting in economic, political, cultural and social oppression, has dramatically increased their vulnerability. COVID-19 is exposing the magnitude of the care crisis in our societies: a crisis that has developed over centuries through the failure of the current system to care for peoples, nature and territories, and its reliance on the work of women to make up

for and fix the damage. Through the sexual di-
vision of labour, women have been and con-
tinue to be socially responsible for care work
in their homes and communities. Women and
girls are the majority of food producers and
providers for their households, they are the
majority of nurses and social workers, teachers
and food workers. Yet, they have been consist-
tently overlooked in research and responses
to the pandemic.

Front-line health and care workers are facing
even greater exposure with inadequate finan-
cial compensation for the risks they take and
poor or absent protective gear. The dramatic
rates’ raise of gender violence and violence
against women during the crisis is rooted in
these systems. 107

Where data is available - including in the North
American section of our report - it is shows that
some black and ethnic minority populations
are disproportionately affected. They have a
death rate of nearly double their white coun-
terparts. 108 109 The causes are not genetic, rea-
sons include high rates of so-called co-mor-
bidities, poverty, and systemic racism. 110

For communities already experiencing pro-
tracted crises — such as armed conflict, oc-
cupation natural disasters, and financial crisis
— the pandemic is compounding the already
difficult challenges they face in securing live-
lihoods and access to food. Many countries in
crisis have also become host to large numbers
of refugees from other fragile countries, add-
ing to the numbers of the most vulnerable and
marginalized people in their care.

Young people have been hugely impacted by
the ensuing economic crisis – seeing their op-
portunities and futures fading away. They face
job losses, no provision of social protection,
loss of education and an increase in care-giv-
ing roles. Youth relying on school meals have
had to go without, impacting their right to food
and nutrition. COVID-19’s exacerbation of ex-
isting unaddressed crises and problems is
pushing more young people towards desper-
ate routes of migration or enrolment in terrorist
bands. COVID-19 has exacerbated the digital
divide. Many without the technology such as
computers or smartphones, or who lack ac-
cess to internet at home, will be unable to con-
tinue their education.

Learning from governmental responses

As the pandemic unfolded across the world,
governments responded in varying ways, ini-
tially to prevent and/or contain the spread
of the virus and limit the severity of disease
and mortality, and then to address the social
and economic impacts arising from pandem-
ic containment measures. While containment
measures were necessary, the way in which
they have been applied has too often exacer-
bated food insecurity. Noticeably few respons-
es were comprehensively aimed at the realiza-
tion of human rights or centred on the needs
of marginalized communities. On the contrary,
grassroots reports show that official responses
most often reflected siloed approaches, lack
of preparedness and coordination. There was
also insufficient international cooperation to
address the factors leading to the emergence
and devastating spread of COVID-19, as well
as to respond adequately to short-term needs
and long-term recovery.

107 https://www.tni.org/en/feminist-realities
108 COVID-19: understanding the impact on BAME com-
government/publications/covid-19-understanding-the-im-
pact-on-bame-communities
109 The Color of Coronavirus: Covid-19 deaths by race and
ethnicity in the U.S, APM research lab 2020
https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race
110 https://www.csp.org.uk/news/2020-06-16-phe-report-
bame-covid-19-deaths-must-lead-change-says-csp
COVID-19 responses deepen inequalities
Many countries imposed nationwide and/or area-based lockdowns and curfews without considering their impact on already marginalized peoples and putting in place remedial accompanying measures. For example, restrictions on public transportation and movement of goods; and closures of territorial and wet markets and street vending. These measures disproportionately affected the livelihoods, jobs, incomes, and access to food, basic necessities and healthcare, of small-scale food producers, casual and formal sector workers, migrants, refugees, informal processors and vendors, and other low-income consumers, who have neither the financial reserves, nor adequate support systems to draw on in times of crises.

Although governments recognized food and agriculture as essential services, pandemic containment measures reflect biases against the centrality of peasant production, artisanal fisheries, small-scale herding, gathering/ foraging, local food systems and food-agricultural labour in ensuring food security. The particular conditions and needs of indigenous peoples, women food producers and workers, and young people were not reflected in containment and policy measures. Many food and agricultural workers did not receive even the most basic health and safety measures to combat the coronavirus, and their internationally recognised rights to living wages, healthcare, workplace safety, social protection, paid leave and collective bargaining continue to be denied across the world. Relief for rural and urban poor families, refugees and migrants was and remains difficult to access because of complicated bureaucratic requirements and corruption.

Evidence from all regions indicates that supermarkets and online retail have been privileged over rural and wet markets and small-scale, local, informal retail on which majority of the population depend for access to affordable and nutritious food. Rather than adapting food supply and demand changes through short supply chains and prioritizing public procurement of the produce of small-scale producers, many policies have privileged private procurement and storage, maintaining downward pressure on the incomes of small-scale producers. Amendments to agricultural laws/regulations are undermining public procurement from small-scale producers and assurances of fair, remunerative prices for their produce. Further, the erroneous association of local wet markets with health risks has threatened to push consumers towards digital retail and ultra-processed foods, jeopardizing the livelihoods and health of millions. Corporations have taken advantage of pandemic related fears and restrictions to increase market share and profits by donating ultra-processed foods for food aid and to needy communities, and marketing themselves as socially responsible actors essential to economic recovery.

We have documented many cases of ultra-processed food companies donating unhealthy foods to mainly indigenous, rural communities, even though it is known that poor nutritional status and its consequences (obesity and diabetes) make immune systems more prone to the effects of COVID. We have noted formula companies marketing and promoting their brands by offering vulnerable communities one can of ‘donated’ formula for every can purchased.

Emergency measures fail to provide for migrants and refugees
People identified as stateless, non-citizens and foreign migrants have not been eligible for government organized food, health and other relief programmes, and have faced stringent restrictions and social discrimination in attempts to meet food and income needs. Lockdowns in camp-based and urban refugee situations have made it difficult for humanitarian agencies to reach these communities.
**Lack of international policy cooperation**

Importantly, Government responses were and continue to be shaped by historical economic and social disparities within and among countries.

Now developing countries face a new spectre of capital flight, large loans with conditionality leading to higher debt, and impending structural adjustment policies. Such conditionalities have adverse effects on populations’ health because they include ill-designed policy measures such as budget cuts, reducing the number and wages of health and social workers, weakening workforce protections, or promoting privatisation. This is in addition to existing debt servicing payments. Developed countries have ploughed billions into stimulus packages, which our evidence indicates are heading in the wrong direction. It is clear that developing counties will also need to invest resources for recovery. All stimulus and bailout packages need to be aimed at supporting those that need them the most, including local food producers and local food economies rather than large players in the industrial food chains. This will require international cooperation for actions such as debt cancellation, unconditional loans and tax justice.

**Erosion of Human rights and Democracy**

In April, the UN warned that “against the backdrop of rising ethno-nationalism, populism, authoritarianism and pushback against human rights in some countries, the crisis can provide a pretext to adopt repressive measures for purposes unrelated to the pandemic”\(^{111}\). This has unfortunately borne true. Around 78\(^{112}\) governments have invoked emergency powers—in the name of controlling the pandemic—that allow them control over all aspects of governance and security with no democratic oversight. While the fine print may vary across countries, these emergency powers enable governments to put in place measures considered necessary in a state of emergency, including full control over financial allocations; power to authorize the use of force; enhanced surveillance and control of telecommunications, media and press; suspensions of human and constitutional rights; and the authority to determine the period of emergency.

In many countries, lockdowns, curfews, physical distancing and emergency measures have been harshly enforced through armed police and military, leading to arrests, violence and death. On the pretext of stimulating economic recovery, the expropriation of forests, land and water resources for industry continue unabated, environmental and labour protection laws have been weakened, and neoliberal policy reforms that favour corporations have been pushed through with limited democratic process and virtually no public participation. Human rights defenders at all levels face heightened risks of criminalization, violence and assassination, with courts and judicial processes suspended under the COVID-19 emergency. In some countries, repressive measures and disinformation have targeted refugees, low-income migrants and those of particular races, religions and ethnicities, leading to social discrimination and conflicts. Regrettably, governments have not used these emergency powers to invest in the necessary infrastructure to address the root causes of the pandemic, co-morbidity, and the resulting social-economic crises.

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, municipal corporations and other agencies in India continue to evict so-called ‘encroachers’ from the public places. The police and administration showed no respect for basic norms and practices in doing so. On the one hand we are asking people to stay in and the other side demolishing their homes despite the fact that United Nations Human rights Commission and UN Housing Rights Rapporteur have categorically asked governments to put a complete moratorium on evictions and displacement.’ CSM landless constituency.

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed the limits of the European food system: its long supply chains, dependency on migrant labor forces, excessive power concentration, export dependency, putting in stark contrast the vested interests of the corporate sector and the failures to feed adequately its population and preserve the planet’ (ECVC).

\(^{111}\) United Nations, COVID-19 and Human rights, We are all together, April 2020, p. 3

\(^{112}\) States of Emergencies in Response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CCPR https://datastudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/1sHT8quodfavCvSDK7t-zvRlJSOLiJuo/page/dHMKB
What worked effectively to tackle the pandemic, hunger, poverty?

Emergency actions from the constituencies and regions
The most effective initiatives to address the COVID crises have largely come from people themselves, acting with diverse organized communities and sectors at multiple levels, including responsive government bodies and public authorities. Across the world, organisations and networks of small-scale food producers, women, consumers, workers and others have conducted campaigns to prevent contagion; protect agricultural and food workers (especially migrants); ensure food and economic security; halt evictions, land-grabbing and environmental destruction; and stop violence against and criminalization of movement leaders and human rights defenders. They have mobilized and supported the distribution of food parcels, cooked meals, delivered basic necessities, health protection materials, seeds, production inputs and other livelihood supports for vulnerable families and communities in their own countries as well as in other countries and regions. They have established safe shelters for migrant workers, refugees, women at risk of domestic violence and social discrimination, and social groups/communities discriminated against on the basis of their citizenship status, religion, ethnicity, race and caste. Indigenous peoples have generated their own sanitary and pandemic control initiatives, combining ancestral knowledge and practices, traditional medicine and materials provided by public authorities. They have put in place distancing and isolation measures, while taking care to ensure local healthy and safe food systems, and strengthening mechanisms of solidarity and traditional reciprocity.

Innovations from territorial food systems
In every region, family farmers, fishers and consumer organisations have created and strengthened direct connections through community supported agriculture (CSAs), community supported fisheries, direct deliveries to households, expansion of food cooperatives and social programmes. Where possible producers have used online platforms to market their produce directly, although the required technologies and infrastructure are not available or accessible to majority of small-scale producers in the global South. An explosion of community-based solidarity and mutual aid schemes from soup kitchens to CSAs and community clinics have helped to plug the gaps of hunger and poverty

Some Encouraging actions by governments show the way forward
In a number of cases government bodies have entered into dialogue with small-scale food producers and civil society organizations and have taken their proposals on board, for example in South Africa, Senegal, Benin, Fiji, Sri Lanka, Canada, Mexico, Europe, Vietnam, South Korea, Thailand and the state of Kerala in India. A few governments’ policy responses have shown that it is possible to move quickly to support the most vulnerable and implement Rights-based public policy for food systems, welfare and protection. These include creating shelters for the homeless, universal basic incomes, cash transfers within weeks. In Europe, the European Commission’s Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies for transforming Europe’s food system to make it fair, healthy, and environmental-friendly, are cause for hope.

In general, local, municipal and subnational government bodies are observed to be more responsive to address the impacts of COVID-19 for more marginalized sections of their population since they tend to be more aware of ground realities than those in national capitals.

References:
3.2 Ways forward towards more equitable and resilient food systems

Break from the neoliberal policy orientation

Evidence and testimonies from across the world collated in our report reveal that although governments and institutions use the narrative of “build back better”, their policies feature more support for neoliberal policies, global markets, big corporations and pro-corporate digitalization and new technologies. In the best cases, there is some emergency support and safety nets for those at the margins. This response will not address either the urgent needs or the structural failures of our food systems. Impacts around the world have demonstrated that industrial global supply chains backed by neoliberal policies are dependent on the extraction and exploitation of people and the planet. They have wreaked economic, financial, environmental and social damage, deepened climate change and inequalities. They have weakened local and regional food systems and reduced countries’ self-sufficiency in food. All of this has rendered many more people vulnerable to pandemics and resultant crises.¹¹⁶

In contrast, communities’ responses have fostered values of community, solidarity, resilience, sustainability and human dignity. These two approaches cannot co-exist. We call for a paradigm shift that reclaims food systems as public commons for the well-being of people and the planet, based on the centrality of human rights, that puts food sovereignty into practice, recognizes the primacy of public policies and strengthens a genuinely inclusive, democratic and coherent model of governance to realize the right to adequate food for all, now and in the future.¹¹⁶

The need for human rights-based COVID-19 responses

Evidence in our report from agricultural workers and migrants, peasants, fisherfolks, indigenous peoples, women, youth, landless, urban poor, consumers, pastoralists, people in protracted crises has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic and many policy responses to it are intensifying ongoing human rights violations. They are impacting people’s access to adequate food, health, decent work and incomes and shelter. The current situation requires urgent action to contain the pandemic, and to prevent further exclusion and social injustice. In the words of the UN Secretary-General, ‘human rights are key in shaping the pandemic response’. They focus the attention on who is suffering most, why, and what can be done about it. Putting human dignity at the centre, they ensure that that the responses to the crisis will address critical systemic causal factors and lead to equitable and sustainable societies.¹¹⁷ States have the obligation to respect, protect and promote the human right to food and nutrition and all related human rights in all decisions and measures they take to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes practicing human rights principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and rule of law.

Democratic oversight and control over COVID-19 measures such as consultations and parliamentary legislative process, must be ensured. Adequate participation, public scrutiny and accountability mechanisms need to be put in place, while taking into account the constraints of the current crisis. Emergency powers that many governments assumed at the onset of the pandemic must be terminated and executive power must be made accountable to democratic bodies and the public. The criminalization of and violence against community leaders, indigenous peoples, workers, migrants lawyers, journalists and other human rights advocates must end and justice systems must be restored to ensure due process for everyone, regardless of nationality, citizenship, ethnicity, religion, race, caste and gender.

Directions for integrating human rights into recovery efforts are present in numerous oth-
er international conventions, declarations and standards. Of particular relevance to the present context are the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas; the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; ILO core labour standards and guidance on work in the COVID-19 pandemic; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Right to Health; the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small-Scale Fisheries; and several CFS policy decisions.

The HLPE states that “At a foundational level, food system transformation requires states and other food system actors to take much stronger measures to uphold the right to food and other human rights. (...) Foundational work on women’s empowerment has emphasized the need for the simultaneous access to resources, the exercise of agency and the achievement of wellbeing outcomes in measuring women’s empowerment. (...) Youth similarly require more support and agency in food systems.”

Putting Food Sovereignty into practice

The vision of food sovereignty asserts the rights of all peoples, nations and states to define their own food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries systems, and to develop policies on how food is produced, distributed and consumed in order to provide everyone with affordable, nutritious, healthy and culturally appropriate food. It emphasizes the democratic control and management of natural resources and local development, ecologically sound and sustainable production methods and social justice. It is a vision rooted in practice and action that invites peoples to exercise their agency and capacity to organize and improve their conditions and societies together, as well as their ability to regain self-reliance and assert food autonomy. As such, it represents the widest framework for exercising the right to food and nutrition and connected human rights (such as the rights of women, of workers, of Indigenous Peoples, of peasants and other people working in rural areas, and of consumers).

Putting the food sovereignty vision into practice in this crisis highlights the essential role that territorial food systems, small-scale food producers and family farmers (mostly women) and food system workers play in feeding the majority of the population in a resilient way, in particular those most affected. Support needs to be directed to maintaining their capacity to produce and provide healthy and nutritious food. Some examples of positive responses cited in our report include: supporting agroecological production, social economies and protection, cooperative marketing, short circuits and supply chains, and ensuring safe working environments and the adequate functioning of territorial food markets, as well as other means of provision of food produced by local, small-scale food producers, including through public procurements.

Prominent proposals for systemic change are agroecology and relocalization of food systems. Agroecology is a way of producing food, a way of life, a science, and a movement for change encompassing socio-economic, socio-political, and biological/ecological and cultural dimensions. While agroecology embraces the ancestral production, systems developed over millennia by small-scale food producers and consumers, it is a living concept that continues to evolve as it is adapted to diverse realities. It provides a holistic understanding of our place in natural cycles, and how food systems must adapt to and restore the biocultural systems on which they depend. Agroecology goes well beyond agricultural production to embrace the entire food system, and calls for paradigm shifts on multiple fronts, including in research, food processing and distribution, consumption and policy-making related to all these aspects.


The CFS’s work on ‘Connecting smallholders to markets’ has broken ground in this direction by affirming the importance of territorial markets, which channel 80% of the food consumed in the world, and formulating a set of policy recommendations directed at reinforcing them.\(^{120}\)

### Reaffirm the primacy of the public sphere

States must play a strong role to champion the public interests related to our food systems. The primacy of public policies over market and corporation-led responses is a precondition to support a radical transformation of food systems, realize the right to adequate food and put food sovereignty into practice. Food is not a commodity but a human right, intrinsically linked to all human rights, and to the commons shaped by diverse peoples across the world.

As suggested in the policy recommendations documented in our report, national and global recovery strategies must direct public policies to boost the productive capacity of smallholders for the coming season, reduce dependency on food imports, and strengthen the resilience of small-scale food producers, Indigenous Peoples, workers, women and youth in rural and urban areas. They must adopt social protection mechanisms for marginalized and vulnerable groups, including distribution of food produced by local small-scale food producers and basic income programs. The human rights of workers such as the right to collective bargaining, social protection and safe workplaces need to be integrated into public policies as a matter of urgency. All responses need to have a gender perspective that effectively address the different forms of discrimination and violence which women face, as detailed in the key policy measures recommended in the autonomous report of the [CSM Women’s Working Group](#). Targeted policy responses for youth are also required, as spelled out in the autonomous [Declaration of the CSM Youth Working Group](#).

The current pandemic is also a key opportunity to build on the work of the CFS and put in place public policies that fundamentally change the way in which our societies are organized and the economic system by which they operate. We need strong regulations to ensure food systems offer decent livelihood opportunities, support regenerative and resilient production-to-distribution networks and provide access to healthy and nutritious food for all. Public sector measures are needed to reduce social, economic and power inequalities in food systems and dismantle power concentration in agro-industrial supply chains. Public investments in building and strengthening public infrastructure for public health, goods, services, welfare and territorial markets needed to be upscaled. Democratic space needs to be strengthened by ensuring that rights-holders can hold public authorities accountable for ensuring respect and legal guarantees for the realization of human rights and the respect of international engagements.

While regional and international trade can play an important role in the short term to prevent hunger and food-related conflicts, it must be subject to enforceable regulation that upholds the public interest. States must reaffirm their sovereign regulatory role over markets, including through stopping food-related speculation and derivatives, regulating prices, public procurements, public storage and market regulation, secure land and resource rights, enforced labour inspections and mandatory environmental laws.

> We cannot go back to normal. We must demand public health, education, all the basic services to which we are entitled, which are public. We need to democratize and socialize our food system. We need agroecology, we need to produce and consume locally and, at the same time, demand global climate justice. We cannot depend on agribusiness to feed ourselves. This is the time for the world to recognize the role of local food production and also the role of women in agriculture, since 60% of food production is carried out by women.” World March of Women, Africa

### Strengthen food governance

As this report shows, knowledge, evidence and experience from the ground should be an indispensable contribution to framing policies. Small-scale producers, family farmers, workers, indigenous peoples, consumers and urban populations know their conditions and have pertinent policy proposals to advance. They have been at the forefront of innovative solutions building on peoples’ knowledge to...
VOICES FROM THE GROUND: from COVID-19 to radical transformation of our food systems

feed their communities during the pandemic, and many of these can be scaled up and out with appropriate backing. The report also demonstrates how local movements have been monitoring impacts at the grassroots levels constantly since the start of the pandemic but that their voices are hardly heard in many other national and international governance spaces.

Governance in a human rights framework, at all global levels, implies that all necessary measures to ensure rights-holders’ agency are taken. It calls on authorities to ensure that right to food strategies and policies are developed, implemented and monitored through inclusive processes that ensure the participation of women and other concerned groups, and that they facilitate sound consumers’ choices.121

Global policy coherence and accountability are key to the governance of our food systems. States must ensure that their actions do not cause foreseeable harm beyond their borders, nor hamper the ability of other countries to honor their human rights obligations. It requires States to uphold their obligation individually and as members of international organizations and international financial institutions to cooperate in order to safeguard the rights of those most at risk and to guarantee an enabling environment for human rights during the current crisis, instead of acting solely based on their own national interests.

Proposals advanced in our report include relieving the debt of all low and middle-income countries to enable them to mobilize “maximum available resources” to protect those at risk during the pandemic, ending economic sanctions which impede states from protecting and fulfilling the human rights of their population, enhancing policy space for import-dependant countries and removing food governance from WTO and trade agreements and relocating it at the CFS.

3.3 A CFS-led Global Policy Response to COVID-19

Why is a global policy response needed?

Past experience teaches us that a food crisis in this globalized world cannot be addressed in the absence of a coordinated global policy response. This was clearly acknowledged in the 2011 HLPE report on “Price volatility and food security”, which recommended global coordination measures to counter the key causes of the 2008 crisis.122 The structural factors that render food systems extremely vulnerable to such shocks are largely constituted in the international sphere. Their nature is well-known, yet little action has been taken to remedy them. The 2020 HLPE ‘Building a global narrative towards 2030’ cautions us that ‘the urgent and worsening FSN situation due to the COVID-19 crisis is a wake-up call to address the multiple complex challenges facing food systems.’123 We are well advised this time: without a multilateral global policy response these vulnerabilities will continue to generate crises.

Why is it needed now?

The evidence from the ground presented in this report amply documents the heavy impact that COVID-19 is already having on the local food systems that ensure the food security and livelihoods of most of the world’s population, including the most vulnerable. The pandemic is threatening democratic and participatory processes that are the best guarantee of peace and justice. It is endangering the attainment of international human rights.

121 FAO, 2005, Right to food Guidelines 3, 8, 9 and 11
122 Specifically: multilateral rules that take into account special needs of poor and vulnerable countries, international cooperation regarding world food stocks; promotion of transparency in futures markets and tighter regulation of speculation.
123 HLPE (2020), pg.xviii.
obligations and engagements, including the SDGs. Impacts over the mid- to long-term will depend to a large degree on the policy responses put in place now by governments. Yet, as reported above, in countries around the world the reactions of national authorities are uncoordinated, lack coherence, and are often tending to aggravate the underlying structural problems. International cooperation takes time to build. We need to start now.

**HLPE 2020 Global Narrative:**
‘Policies that promote a radical transformation of food systems need to be empowering, equitable, regenerative, productive, prosperous and must boldly reshape the underlying principles from production to consumption. These include stronger measures to promote equity among food system participants by promoting agency and the right to food, especially for vulnerable and marginalized people. Measures to ensure more sustainable practices, such as agroecology, also address climate change and ecosystem degradation. And measures to reshape food production and distribution networks, such as territorial markets, help to overcome economic and sociocultural challenges such as uneven trade, concentrated markets and persistent inequalities by supporting diverse and equitable markets that are more resilient...’

Why is the CFS the appropriate place to craft it?

The CFS is able to build on the orientations of the HLPE 2030 Global Narrative report, its COVID-19 policy brief, as well as the other HLPE reports and numerous CFS policy recommendations which are highly relevant to addressing the current crisis. These include the guidelines and recommendations regarding food security in a context of protracted crisis, food price volatility, social protection, responsible tenure, investing in smallholder agriculture, and connecting smallholders to markets. The current CFS Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPoW) directly responds to critical issues highlighted during the pandemic: women’s empowerment and gender equality, youth engagement and employment, reducing inequalities, as well as the need to ensure a sound analysis of the evolving nature of the crisis on the basis of evidence from the ground.

More than any other international governance space, the CFS can count on a deep understanding of how food systems function thanks to its HLPE and to the participation of various constituencies, first and foremost those who produce most of the food we consume. Grounded in a human rights framework, it is the only international forum which can ensure that all actors affected by the crisis can autonomously and legitimately organize to explain their situations and co-construct a global response, for which governments hold the primary responsibility.

The CFS Reform, endorsed by all Member States, established it as the most inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together in a coordinated way to ensure food security and nutrition for all by promoting coordination and policy convergence at the global level. The CFS has the mandate and the capacity to address the fragilities of the world’s food system which COVID-19 is dramatically highlighting. It has the mandate to place the needs of workers, migrants, women, smallholder food producers, Indigenous Peoples, consumers, the urban food insecure, refugees and displaced, the landless and communities in protracted crises at the center of policy proposals. The voices raised in this report urgently call on it to do so.

124 Pg xviii