

Rationale for a global policy response to the upcoming food crisis

(CSM working paper, 16 April 2020):

The rise and spread of the Coronavirus have not only produced a worldwide health crisis, but it is increasingly producing a global food crisis as well. In the process, it is “amplifying” already existing structural inequalities and vulnerabilities in our food systems, not only within countries but also across them. In order to address the looming crisis, and to ensure that rates of food insecurity and malnutrition do not skyrocket - the global community must act now. A global policy response to this food crisis is needed. The CFS, with its inclusive intergovernmental platform, experience addressing food crises, and express mandate in this area, is the clear body to take up this role. The time to act is now.

This document, prepared by the CSM, outlines (1) the particular challenges raised by the Coronavirus to our food systems, food insecurity and malnutrition, (2) why a global and urgent response is needed, (3) why the CFS is the ideal participatory intergovernmental platform to prepare this response and (4) what is the CSM proposal regarding this response.

As the crisis progresses, the need for responses will also progress, as a result this is a **living document**. It will be updated and adjusted as we learn more and as the impacts of the crisis evolve.

1. Reality of an ongoing and upcoming food crisis:

- Even before the spread of the Coronavirus, rates of food insecurity and malnutrition worldwide were unacceptably high and on the rise: 821 million people suffered from food insecurity and 2 billion were malnourished in 2018.
- Of this, small-scale farmers, and especially women, were the most vulnerable population: while they were producing 80% of the consumed foods, they represented more than 50% of the food insecure. This is especially due to the fact that our food systems are not shaped around the needs and the rights of the most vulnerable/marginalized.
- The COVID 19 crisis will increase the financial burden of public authorities, push even more people into poverty and precarity and exacerbate inequalities. Together this will make the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food and achieving SDGs extremely unlikely.
- As highlighted by the HLPE, COVID 19 has and will have major impacts on the food security of the most vulnerable (especially migrants, people living in the streets, homeless and people living in fragile states or in countries at war), impacting food availability, accessibility and adequacy.
 - **These impacts will be direct**, affecting food supply and demand, reducing access to fresh and healthy food (mainly through closures of small-scale food producers’ and informal food markets, loss of income, shortage of labor on the fields, suspension of school feeding programs and closures of food shelters) and increasing food price volatility.

- **And indirect** through lockdowns and decreased purchasing power of individuals and families, causing economic crisis and recession, decreased capacity to produce and distribute food, inadequate responses from states (grain stockpiling, export restrictions, etc) and shifts of diets toward less nutritious foods.
- **These impacts will particularly affect the poorest** whose livelihoods will be heavily affected (see for instance the last [SOFI report 2019](#) that demonstrated how economic slowdowns and downturns were one of the main drivers of food insecurity and increased inequalities, and affected disproportionately small-scale food producers).
 - This situation will particularly affect workers in agriculture and the food sectors. Border closures and emergency containment measures threaten disproportionately the incomes and livelihoods of those 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. Migrant workers are especially at a high risk here.
- **This crisis will particularly affect the food and nutrition security of small-scale food producers as it will profoundly disturb local food systems** (both in terms of production and consumption):
 - SCFP won't be able to sell their products to the local markets as they have been closed by Governments (while the supermarkets are often still open).
 - They will have less access to food due to reduced income.
 - Their production will be wasted and lost, including due to farm labour and input constraints, thus reducing the availability of a wide range of nutritious foods for the population and resulting in a switch of diets towards less nutritious but more available foods.
 - They will not have certainty in the future so they might not invest in the next planting season, thus aggravating and prolonging the situation.
 - In this overall situation, women, with the increased care responsibilities will be even more affected.
- **The crisis will also have a severe impact on urban populations**, particularly though not exclusively those already living in poverty. The crisis has already led to record job loss around the globe, in both poor and rich countries. Without income and adequate social protection, 500 million people are at risk of falling into poverty, new populations will become food insecure, and already food insecure populations will have even greater challenges accessing adequate food for their families.
- Similarly, **the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will have greater repercussions for indigenous peoples**, who were already disadvantaged in terms of health, and will now be heavily affected in terms of food security.
- **All countries won't be equally impacted by the crisis:**
 - It will have drastically more impacts on commodity dependent and low income net food importing/exporting countries (whose economy are particularly vulnerable to economic shock). These countries are already seeing a drastic increase of food insecurity (see SOFI 2019). This highlights once again their dependency and vulnerability towards the global food systems and the need to «re-localize food systems" will become even more apparent.
 - The most indebted countries will pay the cost of the increasing debt burden and the increased demand of financial support for public services, social protection and recovering local economies and food systems

- The most vulnerable populations and especially refugees and displaced people from countries in protracted crises, conflicts or under economic sanctions will be particularly vulnerable to this food crisis.

2. Necessity for a global policy response:

It is now clear that we need a global response in order to address the current impacts of the food crises, and also to take steps to ensure the crisis does not worsen, including through the risk of increasing food price volatility.

There are numerous reasons for the necessity of a global response:

- **Previous experience shows the need of a coordinated global response to face a food crisis:** Experience showed during the food and nutrition crisis of 2008 and 2012 that uncoordinated and non-binding responses led by international actors were ineffective and lackluster compared to a global and systemic answer. This was especially underlined by the first HLPE report of 2011 “[Price volatility and food security](#)” that promoted global coordination measures as the main tool to ensure food security in case of such scenario. The report specifically called for three mutually reinforcing measures that needs to be reminded:
 - 1/ The need for multilateral rules that takes into account special needs of poor and vulnerable countries (and mentioned especially the need for distinct rules for low-income food-deficit countries (LIFDCs).
 - 2/ The need for forms of international cooperation regarding world food stocks and food security including the establishment of guidelines for the efficient management of such stocks.
 - 3) The promotion of transparency in futures markets and tighter regulation of speculation.

Right now, none of those measures is implemented and the main prevention tool that we have, the Agricultural Market Information System –AMIS- (built in response of the failure of 2008 and 2012) is non-binding and nontransparent.

- **Trade policies alone cannot solve the crisis:** Bilateral, regional and global trade policies currently promoted by WEF or the WTO will not be enough to resolve the food crisis. Many of the future food insecure are in informal sectors and will need specific food policies, emergency basic income and other context specific responses to help them cope with the crisis. There is a clear need to organize data collection and good practices capitalization to inform States and regional fora, to monitor the global impact of COVID 19 on food and nutrition insecurity, and to promote agreed upon practices that could help the most vulnerable to cope with the impacts of this crisis. Unlike the 2007/2008 crisis, this is not yet a crisis impacting global trade, rather it is already heavily impacting local producers, food and agriculture workers, urban poor and domestic markets: they must be prioritized by Governments in a coordinated manner.
- **Global crises require global responses:** As this problem is worldwide and is affecting all aspects of globalized food systems, we need to be coordinated and informed at the global level. Given our connected food economy, a State level only response might worsen the situation at the regional level or in other States. As a reminder, inadequate State level response was one of the main amplifying factor of the 2008 food crisis.

- **The current dominant food system is part of the problem:** the immediate and long-term impacts of the outbreak will profoundly highlight already existing structural inequalities and vulnerabilities in our food systems, not only within countries but also across them, thus demonstrating the failure of the global food system to feed the world sustainably. The structural factors for food systems to be extremely vulnerable to this type of shocks are to an important extent internationally made. Those structural factors are already responsible for various environmental, health and social crises all around the world, and make our global food system one of the main contributor to our ongoing global climate crisis. While they are well known and documented in numerous publications including the HLPE report of 2017 "[Nutrition and food systems](#)", little has changed regarding them since the global food crisis of 2008. Without a global policy response, those vulnerabilities will continue to generate crises and will be amplified by the economic recession that will follow the pandemic, thus worsening the food crisis.
- **Local food systems are in need of a global policy answer:** this crisis will disproportionately affect small-scale food producers facing already high levels of food insecurity and will disturb local food systems that are usually resilient to crisis and employ the majority of the local population (up to 60% in rural Western Africa). While some estimate that the number of food insecure globally is likely to double as a result of the crisis, the risk is that most of the State's attention goes to global or national value chains. Local food systems and small-scale food producers will need specific support and attention and it is the role of the international community working on food security to jointly advocate for strong measures to support them.

3. Urgency to prepare now:

- Even if the impacts on the long term are difficult to predict now, the impacts on food and agricultural workers and on small scale food producers are already evident.
- The impact on urban poor is also already evident, as millions have lost their jobs and/or are unable to work as a result of social distancing and quarantine orders. Many have also been internally displaced within their own countries. This combined with a lack of social protection schemes and social safety nets in many countries, is already leading to food insecurity.
- It is thus urgent in the short term:
 - To ensure that local governments promote public procurement schemes to purchase products from family farmers and small producers, as well as strengthen social and solidarity economies and their popular supply networks, ensuring measures for prevention and the use of personal protection equipment.
 - To promote international coordination in favor of strong measure to protect food and agricultural workers' health and safety.
 - To ensure emergency relief for rural areas where 1/ border closures and the loss of markets have plunged agricultural and food workers into overnight destitution and 2/ essential services have collapsed. To ensure that people can have access during periods of social isolation to healthy, diverse and adequate food, and do not depend on highly processed industrialized products of low nutritional quality.
 - To promote water security at all levels. People and their communities need access to safe, quality drinking water for hygiene, hydration and food preparation in order to guarantee adequate and healthy food in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - To strengthen gender responsive public services to promote equal sharing of care responsibilities that usually overburden women with multiple tasks.

- To implement policies for human security and the promotion of human rights, including the fight against domestic violence and against women in isolation.
- To respect the control measures taken by indigenous peoples at the entrance to their territories. As well as providing healthy food aid when necessary, without discrimination and culturally appropriate.
- In the mid- to long-term, the severity of the impact of the Coronavirus on global food availability, food prices volatility, local food system disruptions and levels of food insecurity, will depend on the duration of the outbreak, the application of appropriate containment measures and the policy responses put in place now by governments around the globe.
 - While the exact severity of these impacts are unknown today, we cannot reproduce the mistake of the 2008 and 2012 food crisis where the international community knew that food shortages and price volatilities were coming but 1) failed at delivering a response and 2) took months to react.
- COVID 19 will already have a huge death toll, we must not add to this toll hunger related deaths due to our lack of coordination.
- International coordination always takes time. If we act too late, we might not be able to propose the right responses and our actions face the risk of always running late regarding the severity of the crisis.

4. Necessity to involve all actors:

In order to have an effective, democratic, transparent, legitimate and human rights-based response to the current and impending food crisis, it is necessary put the constituencies most affected by hunger and food insecurity at the center of any response.

- **In particular, we must:**
 - Engage with the regional institutions, as well as governments of countries and constituencies most affected by the food and the climate crisis (as these two crises are interconnected and are mutually reinforcing).
 - Ensure the full participation of constituencies most impacted by food insecurity and malnutrition, including those most impacted by the Covid-19 food crisis. These constituencies include small-scale producers, fisherfolks, indigenous peoples, pastoralists, agriculture and food workers, informal workers, women in charge of care and food related works and urban poor. As per the UDHR, the ICESCR, UNDRIP, UNDROP and the CFS Reform Document, these individuals and communities are rights holders and have a right to participate in decisions that impact them.
 - Ensure that any response to the health and food crisis is framed around a human right framework.
 - Of particular importance is the need for restrictive measures not to be extended or “normalized” after the peak of the pandemic.
 - The democratization of existing bodies tasked with policy-making around food and nutrition security shall also here be promoted. This would include the promotion of strong safeguards against conflict of interest.
 - Any action should not lead to preferential access for transnational corporations in shaping the response.
- **Such a strategy will allow us to:**
 - Build on successful innovations in democratic and multilateral food governance around the globe.

- Respect the rights, particularly the right to food, of the most impacted populations.
- Build collective buy in through participatory engagement and policy development.

Legitimacy of the CFS to coordinate this global response:

- The CFS was reformed as a response to the global food crisis in 2007-2008. During and immediately after the crisis, it was clear the lack of a global space to coordinate joint actions by Governments and other actors resulted in a failed global response to the crisis.
- The [CFS Reform](#), endorsed by all CFS Member States, established 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 at the global level, policy convergence and support and advice to countries and regions
- Drawing on the experience of multi-actor dialogue and negotiated outcomes over the past decade, the CFS has the jurisdiction and mandate to discuss and agree on policy solutions to the fragilities of the world's food system, which COVID 19 is dramatically setting in relief. The CFS is the best equipped to promote a quick, coordinated, and inclusive response to the crisis.
 - The CFS already has developed relevant policy recommendations to the current crisis, aiming at ensuring food security and nutrition and the realisation of the right to adequate food. Among others, it has adopted policy recommendations to address food security in a context of protracted crisis, food price volatility, and social protection.
 - Further, it is able to build on a deep understanding of how food systems function thanks to the participation of various constituencies, first and foremost those who produce most of the food we consume. .
- The value-added of CFS lies in two interconnected characteristics above all. On the one hand, its nature as an international and intergovernmental forum operating under the human rights framework gives it legitimacy to negotiate and adopt policy guidance. On the other hand, its inclusiveness endows it with the capacity to mobilize the broad range of different kinds of evidence that are required to build policy responses on a sound foundation. Due to the fact that it is the only international fora that can ensure that every stakeholders affected by the crisis (from private sector to Members States or indigenous people) can explain their situation and co-construct together a global response that will achieve results.
- CFS members and participants are already engaged in monitoring and assessing the impacts of COVID19 and tracking responses at all levels, from the reactions of people and communities directly affected to measures taken at national and regional levels, up to global phenomena like price volatility. The CFS can count on its own High-Level Panel of Experts but also, and importantly, on the data collection and knowledge generating activities of the RBAs, FAO in particular. At the same time, through the multiple constituencies that comprise it (the CFS is currently "*the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for a broad range of committed stakeholders to work together in a coordinated manner*") , the CFS has unprecedented access to the evidence and proposals of the most vulnerable, who are also responsible for the bulk of food production in the world. Putting these insights and perceptions together, like pieces of a mosaic, can help us to learn lessons regarding what makes food systems resilient and what normative process needs to be engaged to cope with

this food crisis and to work towards inclusive, equitable and sustainable food systems.

- Any kind of coordinated answer needs to be agreed upon by Member States and this is what the CFS excels at doing regarding food and nutrition security issues. The dramatic multiple crisis that is unfolding in front of us is characterized by high levels of uncertainty and complexity. Science is plural and there are divergent scientific views on any topic. Any coordinated global response needs to represent this reality and be the fruits of deliberation and agreed upon conclusions that were built on the listening of diverse, plural knowledges and perspectives. The CFS is better positioned than any other international bodies on this issue.

5. How can this global policy response take place within the CFS?

Addressing the food security and nutrition impacts of the COVID19 crisis needs to receive all urgent and immediate attention. This implies for the CSM the demand to slow down the ongoing policy convergence processes of the CFS, to reprioritize its work, and to reschedule its agenda.

Proposal timeline for Re-prioritized CFS agenda 2020

Objectives:

1. Give priority to the urgently needed global policy response to the food crisis that comes along with the COVID19 health, economic and financial crisis
2. Reschedule the policy processes on food systems & nutrition and agroecology & other innovations in a way that the respective policy negotiations can be conducted through face-to face meetings.

Two different options could be considered for a re-scheduled CFS agenda, which reflects this reprioritization.

Note: Option 2 is our preference as it would give us proper negotiation time for the policy convergence workstreams on Agroecology and other innovative approaches and on the Voluntary Guidelines on Food System and Nutrition. This would also give us proper time to integrate the systemic responses to the critical issue of emerging diseases (see HLPE note), like the COVID19 on the Food System and Nutrition policy convergence workstream. We also believe that this option is the more realistic.

Option 1: In case the CFS Plenary can be held in October 2020 (not likely, but maybe still possible):

- During the coming months, CFS serves uses its potential to be the most inclusive platform of exchange of experiences and analyses to advance the knowledge and dialogue about how the COVID19 crisis affects food security and nutrition. This exchange of knowledge and dialogues can be done on a virtual basis, by including all members and participants involved.
- Out of these learnings, exchanges and consultations, a draft global policy response is elaborated, presented and finalized at CFS 47 in October 2020.
- In this case, is suggested to conduct the policy negotiations on food systems & nutrition and agroecology & other innovations in August and September 2020, for adoption of these policy outcomes at CFS 47 in October.

Option 2: In case the CFS 47 can only take place in January 2021 (more likely than Option 1):

- As in Option 1, the CFS would use its potential to be the most inclusive platform of exchange of experiences and analyses to advance the knowledge and dialogue about how the COVID19 crisis affects food security and nutrition. This exchange of knowledge and dialogues can be done on a virtual basis, by including all members and participants involved.
- Out of this learnings, exchanges and consultations, a draft global policy response is elaborated, *as a living document*, by October 2020 or even earlier, and then further updated, finalized and formally approved by CFS 47 in January 2021.
- Conduct the policy negotiations on food systems & nutrition and agroecology & other innovations in November and December 2020, for adoption of these policy outcomes at CFS 47 in January 2021.