



Impact of COVID-19 on the human right to adequate food in the Pacific region

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating food insecurity and malnutrition in the Pacific region as measures to halt the spread of the virus have had unintended impacts on people's lives, such as rising unemployment and poverty. Moreover, lockdowns and mobility restrictions have caused disruptions in trade within and between states, reducing the availability and accessibility of adequate food, and threatening the sustainability of agrifood systems.

Urgent steps are needed to address food insecurity for the poorest, the most vulnerable and marginalized communities. Measures aimed at providing immediate support to satisfy people's dietary needs should be put in place, including the provision of food and nutrition assistance.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19-pandemic is a test of societies, governments, communities, and individuals. It is a time for solidarity and cooperation to tackle the virus, and to mitigate the negative effects – often unintended – of measures designed to halt the spread of COVID-19. Respect for human rights – including economic, social, cultural, civil, and political – is fundamental to the success of the public health response and recovery from the pandemic. For example, countries with stronger social protection systems were better able to provide adequate and inclusive responses to the pandemic's socioeconomic impacts on people's lives (Roelen and Carter, 2022). Those impacts have been devastating: the World Bank warns that the pandemic has exacerbated income inequality and pushed an additional 97 million people into poverty in 2020 (Gerszon Mahler *et al.*, 2021). With rising numbers of people facing unemployment, disruptions to food access, reduced purchasing power and the limited number of choices available, the enjoyment of the human right to adequate food has become increasingly jeopardized.

Those already living in precarious socioeconomic circumstances, such as people from marginalized groups and persons in vulnerable situations, have been hit the hardest. Depending



on the given context, this may include, among others, women, informal workers, subsistence farmers and ethnic minorities. National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), civil society and local communities can assist in identifying people who may otherwise be left behind or excluded. They can do this by supporting the flow of accessible information to these groups, and providing feedback to authorities on the impact of measures on communities and their access to adequate food.

IMPACTS ON AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

The COVID-19-pandemic has led to disruptions in international trade and domestic food supply chains due to mobility restrictions and/or lack of human resources. Global food commodity prices have continued to increase since the outbreak of the pandemic. In October 2021, food prices surpassed levels of the world food price crisis of 2010–2012.¹ Combined with the loss of incomes and remittances, this has caused food security risks in many countries. The situation is especially tense in fragile and conflict-affected territories, or in countries afflicted by additional crises, such as those resulting from more frequent extreme weather events (floods, droughts) and pests. According to FAO, between 720 and 811 million people in the world are facing hunger, and the number of people suffering from chronic hunger increased by up to 161 million more people in 2020 – the largest single-year increase in decades. Economic downturns resulting from COVID-19 containment measures were key contributing factors to the increase in hunger – often compounded by other factors – most importantly climate change and conflict (FAO *et al.*, 2021). In addition, COVID-19-related economic shocks became one of the most prominent drivers of acute food insecurity in 2020. The number of people that were acutely food insecure and in need of urgent assistance rose to 155 million people – an increase of nearly 20 million people since 2019 (FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises, 2021).

These figures show that the COVID-19 crisis poses a threat to the enjoyment of the right to food, with disproportionate impacts on those who are already most vulnerable. COVID-19 once more puts the spotlight on the importance of healthy diets and safe, sufficient and nutritious food. Under- or malnourished people have weaker immune systems and may be at greater risk of both contracting the virus and of suffering from a more severe course of the disease when infected. Also, people with poor metabolic health, obesity and diabetes are more at risk for a severe course of the virus (Global Nutrition Report, 2021).²

To combat this crisis, states must develop policies and allocate the maximum resources available, adopting a human rights-based approach aimed at progressively advancing food security and nutrition. This requires a cross-sectoral approach that not only focuses on an agricultural perspective, but also on health, trade, social protection and gender equality. Gathering and analyzing accurate data and information is also a crucial step.

COVID-19 AND THE RIGHT TO FOOD IN THE PACIFIC REGION

COVID-19 has entered the Pacific region gradually and to varying extents, with some countries facing considerable infection rates, while others remain still without any known cases as of today.³ Through international border closures and domestic restrictions, most countries managed to either control or completely avoid local outbreaks in 2020 and 2021. Yet, in 2022, the emergence of the Omicron variant caused the virus to spread more rapidly throughout the

region, requiring continuation or even tightening of public health measures and delaying economic recovery while further increasing poverty. Throughout the pandemic, those countries whose economies depend the most on tourism experienced the strongest economic declines as a result of the pandemic. Vaccination rates also vary strongly across the region and vaccination of the entire population will take years, which further perpetuates the risk to human health and welfare (World Bank, 2022).

The effects of the pandemic are thus felt across the whole region, where they have intersected with pre-existing pressure on agrifood systems and exacerbated pre-existing structural inequalities.⁴ Fisheries and agriculture are a main source of food security and nutrition, and income in the region. However, as the Pacific is prone to extreme weather events and increasingly affected by water scarcity, pests and other threats to biodiversity, many Pacific Island States have become increasingly reliant on food imports (Iese *et al.*, 2021).⁵ This makes them vulnerable to increases in international food prices and disruptions in international trade, as well as contributing to the decline of domestic production of staple foods (Conn *et al.*, 2019). Also, trade within and between Pacific Island States is crucial to meet food demands, especially in urban areas. Throughout the region, food insecurity poses a major threat to the urban poor, small-scale fisheries, and to people living in informal settlements (Robins *et al.*, 2020).

Academic research, as well as food security assessments and reports provided by governments, UN agencies, civil society organizations and other humanitarian actors, have explored how the economic downturn in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has put additional stress on Pacific agrifood systems – albeit with great variation across the region.⁶ In this brief, we use some of these findings to illustrate how the pandemic affected the enjoyment of the right to food in Pacific Island States by looking at some of the impacts on each of the right to food’s four core elements – availability, accessibility, adequacy, and sustainability/stability.⁷ This will help policy makers, development actors and civil society representatives to better understand what the human right to adequate food entails and how it relates to real world events and experiences.

BOX 1 | The human right to adequate food

The human right to adequate food is laid down in **Art. 11 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)** as part of the right to an adequate standard of living. Art. 11 ICESCR also recognizes the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger and includes a call for States parties to adopt corresponding policies and programmes.⁸ In 1999, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued **General Comment No. 12 (GC12)** which gives an authoritative, normative interpretation of Art. 11 and identifies the key features of the human right to adequate food which are: availability, adequacy, accessibility and sustainability.⁹ Complementing GC12, the **Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security** provide states with 19 practical recommendations for the realization of the right to food.¹⁰

BOX 2 | Some major impacts of the pandemic in the Pacific region and their effects on the right to food

DISRUPTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE	COLLAPSE OF THE TOURISM SECTOR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limiting food imports → availability • Limiting food imports → availability • Increasing consumption of local, more nutritious food → adequacy • Decrease in remittances acquired from seasonal work abroad → accessibility • Shortages of farming supplies → sustainability • More local agricultural production putting pressure on natural resources → sustainability • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer incentives for suppliers to import food → availability • Surplus of certain food items → availability • Loss of jobs and income → accessibility
MOBILITY RESTRICTIONS	RISING FOOD PRICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruptions in domestic supply chains → availability • Impacting physical accessibility of food → accessibility • Disruptions in transportation and distribution services → accessibility • Limiting availability of fresh products due to disruptions of perishable food value chains → adequacy, availability • Fewer opportunities to attend educational institutions → sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limiting households' purchasing power → accessibility • Forcing households to consume cheaper, less nutritious food → adequacy • Causing increase in home gardening, leading to positive changes in consumer patterns → adequacy • Overburdening of weak social protection systems → accessibility, adequacy

FOOD AVAILABILITY

The core element of availability refers to either being able to feed oneself directly from productive land or other natural resources, or to provide for oneself by purchasing food from well-functioning market systems.

In the Pacific region, many countries rely heavily on food imports which makes them highly vulnerable to disruptions in international trade and food supply chains, as well as to international price shocks. At the same time, there is also considerable domestic food production. Small-scale subsistence farmers and inshore fisheries are key to rural livelihoods, nutrition and food security in the Pacific (Conn *et al.*, 2019).

The availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality in Pacific Island States has been affected by the COVID-19-pandemic in various ways:

- In some cases, the availability of food has been negatively impacted by disruptions in international trade which led to limitations or delays of imported goods (Underhill *et al.*, 2020).
- The collapse of the tourism sector in the region led to a decreased demand for imported food and limited incentives for importers to supply, causing them to adapt to the new

situation by reducing frequency of supplies or cancelling them all together if no longer profitable due to the reduction of volume (Farrell *et al.*, 2020).

- The availability of food was not only negatively affected: decreasing demand for certain products (most notably fresh vegetables, fruits and meat) due to the collapse of the tourism sector caused surpluses and led producers to sell items in local markets and at lower prices, causing increased availability of these items for local consumers. For example, this was the case with pineapples in Fiji (Iese *et al.*, 2021).
- Domestic supply chains have been disrupted because of mobility restrictions within and between states in the region. Mobility restrictions caused shortages of labour, made it more difficult to purchase seeds and tools necessary for food production, and limited the possibilities to market food products. This has particularly struck remote islands and areas which are highly dependent on regional trade as well as urban areas where there are limited possibilities for people to grow their own food (Underhill *et al.*, 2020).
- Food supplied through domestic production or imports through international trade have also been subject to delays, limitations and changes in the supply chain to ensure they comply with health and safety regulations. For example, this was reported in Fiji (FAO, 2020).

FOOD ACCESSIBILITY

Food accessibility encompasses both economic and physical accessibility for all without discrimination, with special attention to be given to groups that are marginalized, discriminated against or otherwise vulnerable, including those living in remote areas or in areas with movement restrictions.

While the Pacific region relies heavily on food imports, there is also an adequate supply of food at the national level through locally grown crops. However, this has not always guaranteed household-level food security, and with many having to move back from cities to rural communities due to lockdowns and other restrictions, there has been a stronger reliance on informal food structures (IFAD *et al.*, 2022). Many Pacific Island State governments have reshaped their policy focus to ensure employment, boost local food production, and guarantee social protection and food security for the most vulnerable. Several countries, for example Fiji and the Solomon Islands, adopted economic stimulus packages to mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic and to provide support to the most vulnerable segments of society (FAO, 2020). Often, government action focused on providing social protection, including cash transfers, to assist those who had lost their jobs. For example, this was the case in Kiribati, Palau, and the Solomon Islands (ADB, 2020). Despite social protection expenditure increasing to unprecedented levels (World Bank, 2021^o), some reports highlight the fact that current mechanisms need to be strengthened, and that this remains challenging in many Pacific countries (World Bank, 2021^o; Keen *et al.*, 2021). There is also some evidence in terms of disproportionate impacts on women-headed households, households with small children, and those with people with disabilities, indicating that policy and programme interventions related to social protection need to pay special attention to vulnerable groups (IFAD *et al.*, 2022).

Measures were also specifically directed at the agricultural sector. For example, Fiji released an agriculture response package for household food security that included a home gardening initiative, the provision of seeds and planting materials to farmers, and the purchase of fresh

products from small-scale farmers to supply local markets (FAO, 2020). Many countries also introduced price control mechanisms for basic food items (IFAD *et al.*, 2022).

COVID-19 and related measures have impacted the overall accessibility of food – often with negative effects on the most vulnerable and marginalized groups – in the following ways:

- Food affordability or economic access is threatened by rising prices as a result of COVID-19, especially for the poor, which has an enormous impact on household diets and dietary outcomes (Underhill *et al.*, 2020).
- COVID-19 has led to widespread loss of jobs and income, especially due to the decline of key sectors such as tourism and export industries. Prior to the pandemic, tourism was the largest economic sector in many Pacific Island States contributing to more than 20 percent of these countries' GDP (reaching as high as 66 percent in the Cook Islands).¹¹ The worldwide collapse of tourism was felt particularly hard in the region (PSDI, 2021). It has not only affected those formerly employed in hotels etc., but also farmers or fishers who rely on tourism to sell their products (IFAD *et al.*, 2022).
- The dramatic decline of tourism also affected markets of certain higher-end products directed towards the tourism industry, most notably livestock, fresh fruits and vegetables. Price drops as a result of oversupply caused financial losses, and in extreme cases, bankruptcy for producers, with severe effects for their purchasing power. The beef industry in Vanuatu or pineapples in Fiji are cases in point (IFAD *et al.*, 2022). Another example from Fiji is the pig industry which shrunk immensely as a result of the decline in demand: The three biggest companies alone faced losses of up to 60 percent of their markets. For many smaller companies with reduced capabilities to cope with the losses, the impacts of price drops have been even more severe (Singh, 2020). At the same time, consumers benefitted from the surplus of these products that led to lower prices in local markets.
- The pandemic also exacerbated youth unemployment in many Pacific Island States. In the region, more than 50 percent of the population is under the age of 25. Before the pandemic, youth unemployment was at 23 percent, which was already considerably higher than the global average of 12 percent. The widespread loss of jobs and income due to the pandemic has hit young people particularly hard since they often work in informal and low-skilled jobs. Additionally, the pandemic has limited the possibilities to physically attend school and to access training opportunities, further impacting future opportunities for young people (Robins *et al.*, 2020).
- Women are often marginalized in Pacific Island States and have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic (CARE, 2020). In addition to having less access to land, agricultural inputs and services, they are more likely to have informal jobs in agriculture and fisheries. For example, women make up between 75–90 percent of all market vendors in Pacific Island States and they and their families rely heavily on the income generated from selling their produce daily (UN Women, 2018). Because of this, lockdowns had a detrimental impact on them as they were no longer able to work in markets, resulting in loss of income and in decreased purchasing power. In addition to being more at risk of experiencing unemployment, economic insecurity, and poverty, women also face greater social care burdens, especially acute in times of school closures and lockdowns (Pacific Women, 2020).
- There has also been a loss of income due to the decrease in remittances acquired from seasonal work, carried out mainly in Australia and New Zealand that some Pacific Island

States depend on heavily. For example, remittances contribute more than 40 percent of the GDP in Tonga. On average, they make up about 10 percent of the GDP in the Pacific Island States (IFAD *et al.*, 2022). Seasonal work options have been drastically reduced as a result of COVID-19 response measures, such as travel bans and mobility restrictions. Additionally, the economic decline has limited the demand for seasonal labour. Economic analysis shows that remittances declined after the outbreak of the pandemic, but then started to increase again in most countries. Overall, remittances have been more resilient than predicted, partly because many workers adjusted their own consumption behaviors to make up for their decreased income and to remain able to support their families at home. Some workers even increased their remittances, knowing that their families were in greater need for it (World Bank, 2021b).

- Most Pacific Island States have weak social protection systems. The most marginalized or vulnerable are often insufficiently included in or protected by emergency relief programmes. Consequently, these systems are not well placed to address structural inequalities and reduce poverty levels (UNICEF, 2020). Even though most countries in the region increased government spending on social protection to alleviate the worst shocks of the pandemic, some groups such as informal workers, many of them women, remained excluded from these programmes (ADB, 2020).
- COVID-19 also affects the physical accessibility of food at household levels. This is particularly acute in areas where movement restrictions have been imposed. Factors such as age and gender may contribute to the unequal allocation of food within the household, possibly putting women, children, or the elderly at risk of restricted access to food, with the disparity intensified by the scarcity of food due to COVID-19. For example, in many traditional households, women usually produce the food but are the last ones to eat (Robins *et al.*, 2020).
- Pacific societies include people who face difficulties accessing food services for a variety of reasons, such as entrenched discrimination, economic and political exclusion, inequality, or political divisions. Such groups include women, national, ethnic or religious minorities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, displaced persons, refugees, older persons, persons with disabilities, LGBTI people, children and youth, people affected by extreme poverty, those living in remote areas, as well as people in detention or other confinement.¹² Often, vulnerability is exacerbated by intersecting identities. Those that were already marginalized before the pandemic were often hit the hardest. In addition, these groups faced greater barriers to cope with shocks and access to social protection schemes (UN Women, 2021). COVID-19 might also lead to new vulnerabilities and ways of marginalizing people.
- In some cases, the accessibility of nutritious and diverse foods for those living in remote areas, including coastal communities and outer islands, was reduced due to disruptions in transportation and distribution services because of movement restrictions (FAO, 2020).

FOOD ADEQUACY

The core element of adequacy means that food must be available in a quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals throughout their life cycle, in addition to complying with specific needs related to factors such as age, gender, and occupation. Additionally, food must be free from adverse substances. This requires the adoption of protective measures for food safety and production. Food must also be acceptable within a given culture while taking into account – as much as is possible – perceived non-nutrient-based

values attached to food, such as traditional or religious rites regarding food consumption and/or preparation.

With increasing food imports, diets have changed in the Pacific. These changes are marked by a shift from local staples such as root crops, to imported cereals like wheat and rice, and are compounded by unhealthy levels of dietary energy intake, low consumption of fruits and vegetables, and high consumption of sugar, fats and salt. All of this exacerbates malnutrition in all its forms, causing a “triple burden of malnutrition,” referring to the coexistence of undernutrition, overnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies (Farrell *et al.*, 2020). Increasing consumption of imported products, which are nutritionally poorer than local foods but often cheaper and easier to prepare, is one of the challenges for the promotion of healthy diets. As a result, many states in the region have very high rates of obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and certain cancers. NCDs are now a major cause of disability and death in the region. Households with limited income seem to be especially affected by restricted access to safe and nutritious food, despite their consumption of sufficient quantities of food to meet energy intake requirements (Conn *et al.*, 2019).

COVID-19 has exacerbated this trend in consumption patterns in many cases:

- Because of increases in food prices (both imported and nationally produced) as well as households’ decreasing financial resources as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, more households have been forced to change their consumption patterns towards cheaper, less nutritious food, with negative impacts for their dietary diversity and health (IFAD *et al.*, 2022; FAO, 2020). In extreme cases, this can lead to under- or malnourishment with longer-term consequences, especially for children. However, there is also evidence that the decreased availability of food imports and the increase in home gardening and local agricultural production led to an increased consumption of healthier food. For example, in Fiji, 48 percent of respondents to an online survey conducted by FAO, said they consume more fresh vegetables than before the pandemic (FAO, 2021).
- It has also been reported that perishable food value chains have been disrupted by mobility restrictions, sometimes resulting in limited availability of fresh products (IFAD *et al.*, 2022). This has detrimental implications for access to healthy diets, especially in urban areas or informal settlements with fewer possibilities for people to compensate for supply shortages by producing their own food. Again, this led to an increase in the consumption of products with low-nutrient-density (Underhill *et al.*, 2020).
- Social protection programmes involving food distribution or price controls often prioritize cheap items that can be easily transported and stored but are less valuable from a nutritional perspective. For example, price control mechanisms in Fiji included many basic food items such as rice, milk and canned meat, but no fresh products (FAO, 2020).
- In some cases, COVID-19 has led to the suspension or circumvention of official food safety inspection programmes which complicates control of the safety of the food supply chain, the sampling and analysis of food, and the management of food incidents. For example, in Fiji, the government abolished the requirement to have a business license in order to be allowed to sell food items. Elsewhere in the region, this contributed to the increase in informal food businesses in the streets or door-to-door, with little attention paid to hygiene or food safety regulations (IFAD *et al.*, 2022; FAO, 2020). While this was often the

only possibility to purchase certain products, it will ultimately negatively affect food safety for consumers.

FOOD SUSTAINABILITY AND STABILITY

Sustainability requires food being accessible for both present and future generations, and thus incorporates the notion of long-term availability and accessibility. It is therefore linked to hunger-reduction strategies and policies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many underlying problems in the agrifood system. In the Pacific region, it has revealed the risks of relying too much on imports to meet food demands. Agrifood systems in Pacific Island States were already under immense pressure before the pandemic, as they are facing unprecedented challenges from an increasing demand for food for a growing population, adverse climate change effects, overexploitation of natural resources, loss of biodiversity, and food loss and waste (Conn *et al.*, 2019). It is therefore crucial to invest in long-term strategies that consider the dietary needs of the whole population, including a special focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups as well as future generations.

The pandemic will have long-term impacts which endanger the sustainability of food security in the following ways:

- As a result of increased domestic production and home gardening, as well as due to disruptions of international trade, some countries experienced shortages of imported farming supplies, including seeds and farming equipment. Shortages led to rising prices which impaired financial accessibility for many farmers and households. This caused planting of certain food crops to be delayed or omitted, which may have long-term negative consequences for agricultural production, and could further exacerbate the dependency on food imports (Cole, 2020; Davila *et al.*, 2021).
- The supply shortages caused by limited trade within and between Pacific Island States, along with people moving from urban to rural areas, resulted in increased pressure on domestic agricultural and aquatic production. This led to an increase in the exploitation of natural resources – especially in regions with already strained ecosystems, such as ones with degraded soils or warming oceans (IFAD *et al.*, 2022; Underhill *et al.*, 2020).
- Lockdowns and mobility restrictions have hindered many people from attending educational institutions or practical vocational training opportunities, which in the future can create shortages of skilled labour in the agricultural sector. This is especially harmful to the many young people in the region who lack employment perspectives (Robins *et al.*, 2020).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACTS

The pandemic has highlighted the Pacific region's specific vulnerabilities associated with heavy reliance on imports to access food, exposure to severe climate and environmental risks, and high rates of mal- and over-nutrition. Concerted efforts will help countries to remain on track for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Experience during the past two years has proven that short-term measures were needed to alleviate the pandemic's

immediate impact on people's lives and livelihoods. This included addressing food insecurity, especially for the poorest and most marginalized, through food and nutrition assistance. It also required securing stable food production and supply, for example, by ensuring mobility and safe working conditions of workers across the food system, as well as by providing financial and other support to small-scale farmers and fishers. Many examples from the region show that both approaches have been pursued by Pacific Island States as part of their response plans.

At the same time, the pandemic has further exposed the need to tackle structural inequalities in order to be more resilient to future crises, ensure inclusive development, and build fairer societies grounded in universal respect for human rights. The State is responsible for guaranteeing the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all people within its jurisdiction, both during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the post-pandemic recovery. Transparent, responsive and accountable governance is required. Seizing the opportunity to revisit international human rights commitments and applying a human rights-based approach in the design of COVID-19-recovery and long-term development plans for Pacific Island States will help to build back better and to further advance the achievement of the SDGs, while leaving no one behind. In the long run, this may include:

- **Strengthening the policy and legal framework around human rights, including capacity development, advocacy and awareness-raising:**

In order to guarantee full enjoyment of human rights, states should ensure that they are firmly rooted in the national legal system – for example by guaranteeing them in the national constitution, or by passing specific sectoral laws, such as on the right to food in the context of school food. This also includes the establishment of legal redress mechanisms, as well as the provision of capacity-building and awareness-raising. The latter should address both state actors responsible for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling specific human rights, as well as such organizations tasked with holding governments accountable and providing legal aid to rights holders (NHRIs, civil society, consumer organizations, etc.). For example, policy officers in the national Ministries of Agriculture should be aware of the content and relevance of the right to food and their corresponding obligations as State representatives. In that respect, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security will continue to provide important policy considerations that can help realize the right to food.

- **Monitoring the national human rights record, specifically regarding most-at-risk populations:**

Both within the context of their reporting duties within the UN human rights system, as well as through national monitoring procedures, governments should keep track of their human rights performance and design strategies for its continuous improvement. This should entail exchange with rights holders, including those belonging to minorities, represented by civil society organizations, National Human Rights Institutions, or other kinds of associations (trade unions, faith-based organizations, etc.). Human rights assessments should include the collection of meaningful data, disaggregated according to gender, age, economic status, ethnic origin and any other category relevant in a given context. They should furthermore aim at both monitoring existing, as well as detecting

newly emerging vulnerabilities, reflecting awareness that policy measures can impact differently on different groups and that policy measures may have unintended consequences.

- **Ensuring meaningful participation of affected populations in decision-making procedures:**
The members of society that will be affected by any given policy measures should be involved in the design of these measures, for example through prior consultation, or by directly including their representatives into policymaking processes. Participation depends on the full disclosure of relevant information, in a language and format accessible to affected communities. It also requires understanding the needs and concerns of these communities, especially if they are in acute distress. Particular attention should always be given to the adequate involvement of women and youth in all decision-making. Mobilizing and increasing the capacity of all actors at all levels, and creating conditions so that actors can be part of policy solutions, improves policymaking and increases compliance with policy measures.
- **Promoting the role of and cooperating more closely with national oversight institutions and civil society:**
National oversight institutions include National Human Rights Institutions, ombudspersons, or anti-discrimination agencies. They should be equipped with sufficient financial and human resources, as well as political independence. Their mandate should include a specific focus on the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized segments of society. Civil society organizations facilitate communication between rights holders and duty bearers and represent individuals' or communities' interests towards the State. Both play an important role in holding states accountable for their human rights performance. For governments, they provide valuable information on human rights deficits in their programmes, especially when dealing with sudden shocks and emergencies. Rights holders, on the other hand, might require their support to know and claim their rights and to express complaints towards state actors. Therefore, when designing policy responses to future crises, these institutions should be consulted and given the opportunity to propose alternative approaches or accompanying measures to alleviate negative impacts on human rights. Importantly, they must be guaranteed the freedom to carry out their work independently and without fear of political repression.
- **Recognizing the interdependence of human rights and promoting policy coherence:**
The full realization of all human rights and the SDGs must be the guiding principle of all development planning. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the interconnectedness of policy sectors as well as of human rights, and in the future it will be crucial to promote policy coherence among sectors as diverse as national health, food security, environmental protection, employment and economic development. Prioritizing national health and safety has in some cases compromised the enjoyment of other human rights, such as those to food or education, for example, which in turn had negative effects on the right to health. Likewise, ensuring decent work, wages and labour conditions for workers in agrifood systems positively impacts upon the enjoyment of the human right to adequate food. Increasing attention given to the One Health approach reflects the recognition of the connection between human, plant and animal health, as well as our collective relationship with a shared environment. Only by recognizing and addressing these interlinkages will it be possible to realize the Agenda 2030 while leaving no one behind.

NOTES

¹ FAO Food Price Index, available at <http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>. On the October 2021, see also <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/world-food-prices-reach-new-peak-since-july-2011/en>.

² For health- and nutrition- related risk factors, see also information provided by the World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/ncds/un-interagency-task-force-on-ncds/uniatf-policy-brief-ncds-and-covid-030920-poster.pdf?ua=1>, <https://www.who.int/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyathome/healthyathome---healthy-diet>.

³ Detailed information on the COVID-19 situation in the region is provided by the World Health Organization Western Pacific Office. For example, see their Data Dashboard on COVID-19, available at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/e1a2a65fe0ef4b5ea621b232c23618d5>, or their COVID-19 situation reports, available at <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/covid-19/situation-reports>.

⁴ For a depiction of pre-COVID-19 Pacific food systems challenges, see for example, Conn *et al.*, 2019.

⁵ “Pacific Island States,” as defined by the UN, refers to 10 countries in the Pacific region: Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Nonetheless, some of the findings presented here may apply to other countries in the region as well. For the UN definition, see <https://unterm.un.org/unterm/display/record/unhq/na/ac6ec644-3d9a-4fc4-afa5-3ad5a16e93c5>.

⁶ See for example: Davila *et al.*, 2021, Iese *et al.*, 2021, IFAD *et al.*, 2022, Robins *et al.*, 2020, and Underhill *et al.*, 2020.

⁷ As defined by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (see for example, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/food>) and derived from the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’ General Comment No. 12 on the Right to Adequate Food (para. 6-13), available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2f1999%2f5&Lang=en.

⁸ The ICESCR is available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>.

⁹ The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is the authoritative treaty body of the ICESCR. The full text of General Comment No. 12 can be found at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2f1999%2f5&Lang=en

¹⁰ The Guidelines were adopted by FAO Council in 2004. The full text in 8 languages is available at: <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/cceef08f-0627-5ec9-a8e2-63d7c0b608c2>

¹¹ Tourism was the largest economic sector in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Palau, and Vanuatu, and the second largest (after remittances) in Samoa.

¹²LGBTI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex, see for example at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/lgbti/Pages/index.aspx>.

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