

27th Session of the Committee on Agriculture

Item 2.5: Update on COVID-19 and its impact on food security and nutrition, and food systems -

Introduction notes

The combined impacts of COVID-19, a global recession will make a bad situation of hunger and malnutrition significantly worse in 2020 and into 2021. Poor people in low-income countries and in many middle-income developing countries that depend on food imports are especially vulnerable. Unlike during the 2007-2008 food crisis, today's challenge has not been primarily one of food availability but food access; this could change, however. A second wave of the pandemic and uncertainties surrounding the availability and accessibility of treatments and vaccines for COVID-19, prolonged, deep economic slowdown, and slower than expected recovery create conditions that threaten food supply and food access for hundreds of millions of men, women and children.

While it is essential that we prepare for an increased need for emergency response in known hotspots, the most effective and cost-efficient strategy remains to protect and improve livelihoods in and around food systems. This is true both for people in emergency hotspots and for the many hundreds of millions more enduring chronic hunger, the two-billion afflicted by micro-nutrient deficiencies, and the more than two billion struggling with overweight and obesity.

Preventing hunger should be at the core of the COVID-19 response. Ensuring nutrition for all is essential to the health response. With 4.5 billion people employed or earning livelihoods in food supply and distribution, food systems are essential to the socio-economic response. And there is today, more than ever before, public recognition that we need to accelerate action to make our food systems compatible with our planet's ecosystems and resilience.

FAO is continuously assessing the pandemic's evolving impact on food security and nutrition and is providing evidence-based policy recommendations to Member Countries and encouraging and enabling them to work together. FAO is also working closely with UN Country Teams and other agencies in national COVID-19 assessments and, using the Hand-in-Hand approach, is leading programmatic efforts to keep food supply chains working to save lives and livelihoods, ensure food and nutrition security for all, and contribute to a global effort to begin to transform our food systems guided by the aspirations and commitments of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Committee is invited to:

- Consider the impacts of COVID-19 policy response on sustainable development of food and agriculture and identify areas for further action;
- Identify possible innovations to strengthen the impact of policy responses to COVID-19 and ensure that no one is left behind;
- Consider potential areas of investment for strengthening policy response to accelerate improvement of agri-food production, processing and distribution.

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