

Extraordinary CFS Bureau and Advisory Group Meeting

13 May 2020, 14.00-16.00
Virtual meeting (ZOOM platform)

Thank you for inviting me to inform the CFS on the WHO Response to the COVID-19 crisis.

WHO is providing leadership on the health-related response to this global crisis and engaging in partnerships where joint action is needed. According to yesterday's daily situation report, globally, the number of total confirmed cases has exceeded 4 million with more than 280 000 deaths.

In order to avert a Global Food and Nutrition Crisis, it is vital to revert this Global Health Crisis. WHO continues to source medical equipment and supplies to help Member States access global markets, which are overwhelmed by unprecedented demand. WHO is also supporting the installation of COVID-19 treatment centres in a number of countries. Together with the Global Health Cluster, we coordinated inputs from partners to update the Global Humanitarian Response Plan.

WHO is working with partners to model the impact the pandemic on the health of nutrition of women and children, as well as the delivery of routine essential services. Preliminary estimates indicate that the number of stunted children might increase by 700,000 for each percentage point of drop in countries' GDP. Other estimates indicate a potential 20-25% increase in the number of wasted children, which is about 10 million, on top of the current 47 million. Worth noting that currently we are able to provide adequate support to only 10 million of wasted children. UNICEF is reporting disruption of immunization services in 24 countries, nutrition services in 8 countries and wasting management services in 4 countries.

As a normative Agency, WHO is providing guidance on a number of relevant areas. Two of these areas are particularly important for our discussion today on food security and nutrition.

First, food Safety. Together with FAO, WHO has developed Guidance for competent authorities responsible for national food safety control systems on how to optimize food control functions and prioritize critical services that preserve the integrity of food safety systems and Guidance for food businesses to protect the food supply and the health of food workers along the food production chain. WHO is also developing new Guidance on Reducing public health risks associated with the sale of live wild animals for food in traditional food markets, in consultation with FAO and OIE, with the purpose to improve regulations and management systems for these markets and prevent transmission of disease from human to animals. Traditional food markets provide access to fresh and affordable food to millions worldwide and should be given adequate attention. Safe food markets will be the focus of this year World Food Safety Day on June 7th.

Second, the Function of Health Services. Jointly with UNICEF WHO has developed Operational Guidance for maintaining Essential Health Services and Guidelines on Community-based health care. We have also clear messages on how to continue breastfeeding in the guidelines on clinical management of severe acute respiratory infections when Covid-19 is suspected.

Clearly a scale up of response is needed to prevent and mitigate the impending food security and nutrition crisis. WHO and sister UN Agencies, jointly with the governments of UK, US, the Netherlands, Ireland, and several Foundations and Civil Society Organizations) is launching a call for action, to maintain and increase the coverage of essential nutrition actions, keep nutritious food supplies moving and reshape food environments. It is important to support and to continue innovating social protection programmes and public food procurement to enable consumption and production of healthy diets.

As the COVID-19 crisis spreads across the world, we have the opportunity to reflect on the transformation needed if we want to

develop a food system that nourishes all people, and at the same time regenerates and sustains the environment, and enables the resilience and flourishing of culture and community. We must seize this opportunity now, to build back better.

Thank you very much