

**Virtual High-Level Special Event on Food Security and Nutrition of the
Committee on World Food Security (CFS)
13-15 October 2020**

**Highlights from day two, Wednesday, 14th October 2020
COVID-19 and its Impact on Global Food Security and Nutrition**

Parts 1 & 2: Opening and Setting the Scene

The **second Plenary Session of the Special Event** (Wednesday, 14th October 2020, 1:00-4:00 PM, Rome time), moderated by [Mr. David Nabarro](#) (Strategic Director, [4SD](#) – Skills, Systems & Synergies for Sustainable Development) aimed at reflecting on the impacts of COVID-19 on global food security and nutrition and efforts needed to “build back better” using the [HLPE issues paper "Impacts of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition: Developing Effective Policy Responses to Address the Hunger and Malnutrition Pandemic"](#).

- **Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (WHO)**, in its [keynote address](#), underscored that since the pandemic outbreak, 37 million cases and over 1 million deaths have been reported to WHO, while the impacts of the pandemic go far beyond health. WHO expects a 14% increase in child malnutrition globally, which translates to additional 6.7 million malnourished children. Vulnerable populations in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are expected to be the most affected. Ten thousand children a month could die, and millions of children will be struggling to get healthy food to eat. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed and exploited inequalities within and between countries. Livelihoods have been lost, the global economy is in recession and geopolitical divisions have been deepened. Dr. Tedros recalled that in July 2020, [WHO, WFP, FAO and UNICEF issued a joint call to action](#) to protect children’s right to nutrition in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. He then emphasized that the “One Health” approach is key to promote and protect the health of humans and animals, while mentioning WHO’s “[Manifesto for a Healthy and Green Recovery](#)” from COVID-19. In conclusion, Dr. Tedros outlined three policy priorities which are deemed crucial in the fight against COVID-19: 1) access to nutritious, safe and affordable diets; 2) countries need to take actions to meet national dietary guidelines; and 3) governments must work in a whole-of-government approach to support sustainable food systems that can provide healthy diets.
- **[Mr. Guy Ryder](#), Director-General, International Labour Organization (ILO)** stated that, to date, working hours equivalent to 500 million full time jobs have been lost globally as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This results in a massive loss of labour incomes bringing the risk of millions of people falling into poverty and thus becoming food insecure. Mr. Ryder pointed out that in low- and middle-income countries the loss of labour income stands at 15%, i.e. \$1 in 6 in people’s pockets. He also stressed that the agri-food sector faces an existential threat while agricultural workers generally experience high levels of working poverty, irregular earnings, inadequate conditions and poor protection of their rights. Many of the agricultural workers are found in the informal economy lacking any form of social protection. Mr. Ryder highlighted that, while unprecedented fiscal packages have been adopted by some wealthy countries, a worrying gap has emerged between the stimulus packages of wealthier countries and those of emerging and developing countries: ILO estimates that the gap amounts to \$980 billion. Mr. Ryder concluded his remarks by mentioning the joint [statement](#) by ILO, FAO, IFAD and WHO, issued on 13 October, on the “impact of COVID-19 on people’s livelihoods, their health and our food systems”.
- **[Mr. Martin Cole](#), Chairperson, Steering Committee of the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE)**, provided a [presentation](#) on existing data and

research gaps in the response to COVID-19 while illustrating the following recommendations contained in the [HLPE issues paper "Impacts of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition: Developing Effective Policy Responses to Address the Hunger and Malnutrition Pandemic"](#) and [HLPE report "Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030"](#):

- Implement more robust targeted social protection programmes to improve access to healthy and nutritious foods;
- Ensure better protections for vulnerable and marginalized food system workers and farmers;
- Provide better protections for countries that depend on food imports;
- Strengthen and coordinate policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic impact;
- Support more diverse and resilient distribution systems;
- Support more resilient food production systems based on agroecology and other sustainable forms of food production.

Part 3: Panel Discussion: Coping strategies, lessons learned and building resilience to prevent future pandemics

- **Argentina:** [His Excellency Luis Eugenio Basterra](#), Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries highlighted that the Argentinian government has been taking early measures to strengthen the national health system (e.g. special intensive unit beds are now at 62% capacity), and adopted a health protocol to guarantee the safe production and movement of workers across the different districts of the country. Argentina has also agreed with Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia and Peru on the possibility to have shared protocols to ensure commodities could circulate without restrictions. The country has adopted an emergency programme which benefitted over 9 million people (1/4 of the population) by providing them with an income to compensate for reduced economic activities or unemployment. Minister Basterra emphasized that the main drivers of food systems transformation, such as climate change, technological transformation, digitalization, and change in food demands, need to be vigorous while resilience and social inclusion must be strengthened. In conclusion, he stated that, internationally, there is a need to focus on reducing the existing gaps between countries, for instance, on trade, and “that is where FAO and other international organizations must play a key role”.
- **India:** in his [remarks](#), [His Excellency Kailash Choudhary](#), Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare emphasized that, since the COVID-19 pandemic may have long-term implications on food security and supply chain, there is a need for closer interaction and knowledge sharing among countries to keep the normal functioning of food supply chains to safeguard food and nutritional security as well as the livelihood of farmer producers. “We are and will continue to share best practices with and build capacities of other developing countries, bilaterally, in multilateral fora and [in collaboration with organisations like FAO, WFP and IFAD](#), to name a few, so as to enable them to also become self-sufficient and food secure”, said Minister Choudhary. He also informed that, to ensure continuity in the country’s supply chain, the government has decided to exempt all agriculture operations from the restrictions imposed during the lockdown since March 2020, while issuing detailed health protocols and prescribing social distancing norms. As part of the economic response to COVID-19, the government has also made additional allocation of food grains to all 36 States reaching approximately 8.1 million beneficiaries. Finally, he stressed that India’s electronic National Agriculture Market portal (e-NAM) is playing a pivotal role in decongesting agriculture markets during COVID times by allowing farmers, traders and buyers to trade commodities online.
- **Spain:** [Mr. Gabriel Ferrero](#), Director-General for Sustainable Development Policies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation underlined the extreme importance of universal social protection systems to face systemic shocks, such as COVID-19, as well as ensuring access to adequate and stable sources of food. In this regard, he mentioned that a minimum universal income has been assured in the country. Mr. Ferrero then pointed out the crucial role of agricultural inputs

and sustainable agriculture highlighting that local markets are more capable of resisting to shocks and suffer less the restrictions that the pandemic imposes on international trade. He underscored that agroecology is a priority for the country (“Spain is a leading country on agroecology in the European Union”) and an essential component of its climate change policy. In conclusion, small scale family farming was defined as imperative for the protection from and prevention of zoonoses, while stressing that Spain is supporting family farming both domestically and globally through the UN Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028.

- **CFS Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSM):** Mr. André Luzzi, Habitat International Coalition stated that the CFS must reaffirm the primacy of the public sphere in the response to COVID-19. According to CSM, there is a need to develop a global response to the pandemic which leads to a radical transformation of food systems based on food sovereignty. CFS needs to strengthen global food governance by ensuring that all stakeholders organize themselves to build together such a global response. Governments have a primary responsibility in that respect together with international organizations. Mr. Luzzi finally pointed out that the right to food needs to be guaranteed through access to land and holistic understanding of food systems.
- **EAT Forum:** Ms. Gunhild Stordalen, Founder and Executive Chair of EAT Forum underlined that the pandemic has become even more deadly and costly due to obesity and other diet-related diseases. However, today solid scientific evidence shows that it is possible to feed 10 billion people in the future without destroying the planet as well as transform food systems in an equitable way, benefitting farmers, rural economies and creating new jobs. Three major strategies are deemed crucial in this context: 1) produce food in a way that restores biodiversity and, to achieve this, we need both a global treaty to protect natural ecosystems and the necessary financial mechanisms to enable it; 2) produce a diversity of healthy nutritious crops; 3) food needs to be made available, affordable and attractive to everyone. Ms. Stordalen stressed that EAT continues to work with partners in driving new knowledge, generating actions and engagement. EAT has also set up a Food Systems Economic Commission to define economic cases for action, and is working with CGIAR to fill knowledge gap on sustainable intensification and regenerative agriculture.
- **International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI):** Dr. Jimmy Smith, ILRI Director-General stressed that wet markets are not be banned, rather the marketing of wildlife in them should. Wet markets represent a source of food for 70-80% of people in the developing world, particularly low- and middle-income countries. ILRI’s recommendations are as follows: banning wet markets would have a deleterious effect on food and nutritional security; wet markets need to be made safer; better opportunities for sanitation should be provided; and people operating in these markets need to be trained and certified to produce healthy and safe products. According to Dr. Smith, the “One Health” approach is crucial as COVID-19 came at the intersection of human-animal-environmental health: “that is why we need to have a response that allows us to work in a horizontal way”, avoiding disciplinary and institutional insularity. In this context, he highlighted that joint funding to Ministries would be a useful short-term solution, while long-term solutions need to focus on training practitioners.
- **CFS Private Sector Mechanism (PSM):** Ms. Diane Holdorf, Managing Director, Food and Nature, World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) emphasized that the impacts of COVID-19 were significantly varied across industries and geographies. Accessibility and affordability have been extremely uneven through the COVID-19 pandemic as government responses did not necessarily address the most vulnerable. The following example of responses from the private sector were mentioned: innovation, technologies and digitalization to connect to farmers and suppliers through real time payments; quick fundraising to help those most in need; targeted investments and advance payments made by companies like Bayer, Danone and Unilever; creation of crisis response mechanisms. According to Ms. Holdorf, the following actions need to be taken by companies and governments alike: 1) protect employees’ (citizens’) jobs; 2) ensure cash

flows; 3) focus on nutrition; 4) build collective leadership and partnerships; and 5) accelerate farmer-focused responses. She finally highlighted that the [CFS RAI Principles](#) are key to define how responsible investments in agriculture and food systems can contribute to food security and nutrition, keeping people at the centre of decision making.

Part 4: Audience Interactive Question & Answer Session

During the interactive question and answer session, the following interventions were made:

- **EU Delegation to the UN Rome-based Agencies (RBAs):** Mr. Damien Kelly, First Secretary and Alternate Permanent Representative highlighted the important role of CFS in policy convergence and commended the HLPE Issues Paper on COVID-19. He also emphasized that the EU attaches great importance to the “One Health” approach and expressed support to the statement made on this topic by Dr. Jimmy Smith (ILRI).
- **Alliance of Bioversity International & CIAT:** Mr. Juan Lucas Restrepo, Director-General warned that the current incentives risk to lead to the precarious equilibrium pre-COVID-19 and impede to reshape food systems. According to Mr. Restrepo, there is a need to shift towards shorter circuits between production and consumption empowering local market actors. It is deemed crucial to leverage on research to identify marginalized varieties of nutritious crops that can be reintroduced into diets, fighting food insecurity and malnutrition. Research is also key to promote regenerative production systems that increase biodiversity and improve soil and water quality.
- **Global Alliance For the Future of Food:** Ms. Ruth Richardson, Executive Director underscored that the Alliance has come up with 7 calls to action based on eight years of collaborative work with the private sector, civil society and policy makers. Amongst them, she emphasized the need to redirect public sector finance and fiscal policies across the value chain towards agroecology, shorter and diversified supply chains, healthier food and resilient livelihoods and communities.
- **France:** Her Excellency Celine Jurgensen, French Permanent Representative to the RBAs called on a deeper cooperation among WHO, FAO and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) for the implementation of the “One Health” approach. By echoing CSM’s position and recalling the findings of the HLPE Issues Paper on COVID-19, Ambassador Jurgensen stressed that a global coordinated policy response to the COVID-19-related food crisis is necessary.
- **PSM:** Ms. Robynne Anderson, President, Emerging Ag Inc. noted the importance of a cohesive and coherent response to COVID-19. In this regard, PSM believes that both CFS and the Food Systems Summit 2021, and related UN processes, add to stakeholders’ capacities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Hungary:** along the same lines of CSM, France and PSM, His Excellency Zoltan Kalman, Hungarian Permanent Representative to the RBAs emphasized that the CFS needs to play a leading role in a global coordinated policy response to the deep food crisis accompanying COVID-19.