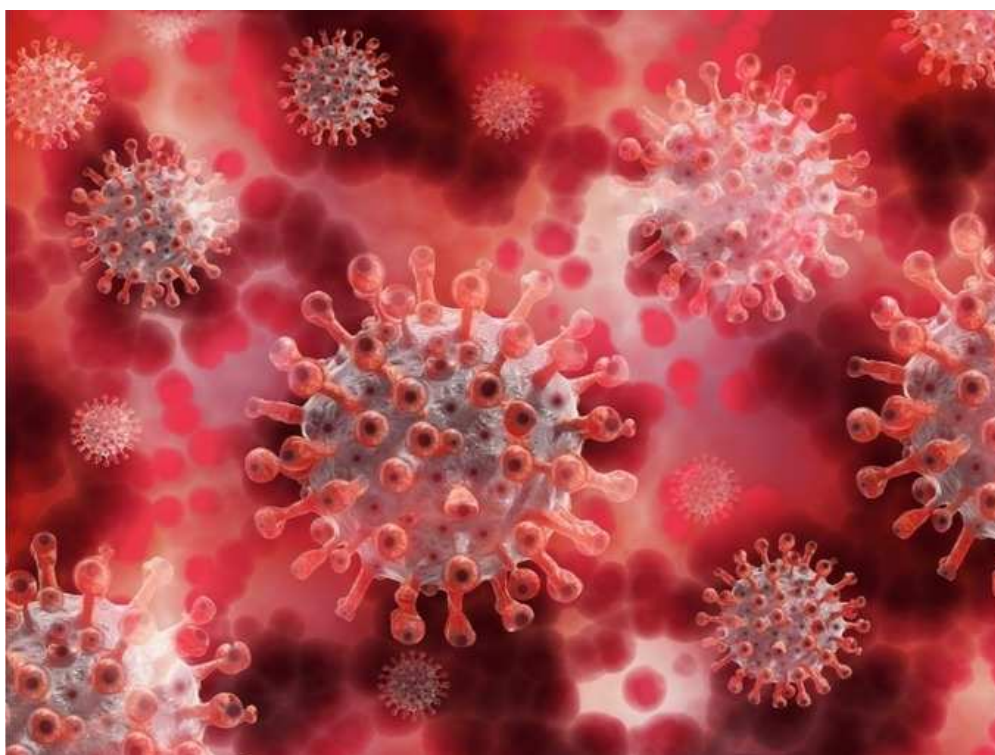


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Newsletter Vol.24

Dealing with food security in the face of COVID-19: What Governments should focus on



Dear AR4D colleagues,

*The Corona Virus (COVID-19) continues to spread rapidly across the globe, countries across the world have shut down major socio-economic functions, putting livelihoods in a precarious situation. Our staff **Ben Moses Ilakut** looks at various perspectives of the thorny journey we have to take.*

A genuine fear that the worst is yet to come in regards to food and nutrition security is looming. The months of April, May and even the preceding months could pose some of the worst disruptions in food supply chains ever since the Global Food Crisis of 2007-2008 sparked off by rising food prices. The crisis reached an unprecedented peak in 2011 prompting ASARECA in

partnership with the CGIAR to undertake evidence-based advocacy to curb food prices. The approach then was to keep policy-makers well informed of the food trends and their implications to avoid ad-hoc policy actions, which could have worsened the situation.

Some of the recommendations given to the leaders at the time included: Working collaboratively as a region to allow food to move from production zones and areas of surplus to areas of deficiency; and making efforts to turn the crisis into a stimulus for domestic production and regional trade and integration.

The arithmetic of doing this in the face of the Corona virus is complicated since a balance has to be made between stopping the spread of the disease through restricted person-to-person contact on one hand, and ensuring emergency movements to provide families with food on the other hand. But the balancing act can be done.

A good example is the approach taken by Uganda. In his regular briefings, on measures to contain the spread of the disease, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni has literally shut down all functions that could compromise social distancing. He, however, has consistently been careful not to extend restrictions to cross-border and internal cargo movement, especially the movement of food supplies. Inbound and outbound cargo has been spared the travel ban, just as internal deliveries have been. This is a move that Governments across the world could exercise since, according to FAO, "there is still enough food to feed all people."



The CGIAR, the largest global AR4D grouping, has highlighted key areas where things could go haywire if not addressed. They include: The food systems which have been significantly affected, and whose impacts will grow if processing enterprises cannot restart production in a near future; production of staple food crops if the outbreak continues into critical planting periods; domestic and international trade disruptions, which may trigger food price panics; restrictions on mobility which may lead to labour shortages, among others.

Luckily, the African rural areas are not as vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 as are the cities. Many Governments have already taken measures to stop the urban populations from transferring the virus to the rural areas, which are naturally the food baskets. However, there is a danger that restrictions of movement could affect farm productivity due to shortage of fertilizers, veterinary services and other inputs, while the closure of food cooking businesses could curtail fresh produce and fisheries products, affecting producers and suppliers. The Governments should therefore move to ensure that the rural areas are resourced with agricultural inputs and resident extension services to encourage them to produce more to feed the urban populations. Given the currently favourable rain patterns, this could turn out to be an opportunity for farmers to reap big from their urban folk who have been grounded and are requiring more food supplies.



There is also need to put in place logistical systems including storage, transport and protective gear, to move food from places of production and surplus to places of deficiency. Noting that the Corona pandemic could escalate before it calms down, governments could besides securing lives from the virus, invest in postharvest facilities to store, and move food where it is most needed.

According to the CGIAR, action now needs to focus on: Increasing support for production entities; ensuring the smooth flow of trade and making full use of international markets to secure food supply and demand; ensuring smooth logistical operations of regional agricultural and food supply chains; monitoring food prices and strengthening market supervision; explaining issues related to wet-markets and livestock-wildlife interface and how to mitigate future zoonotic disease and supporting one-health approaches; increasing resilience and mitigation of social disruptions by increasing local food productivity and water access. It is clear from this list that coordinated regional action towards production and keeping food circulation has an important place in pushing back the impacts of COVID-19.

Finally, as the world grapples with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the FAO has attempted to answer critical questions in the face of the pandemic globally. Some of the key questions posed and answered by FAO are:

- Will COVID-19 have negative impacts on global food security?
- Whose food security and livelihoods are most at risk due to the pandemic?
- What are the implications of the COVID-19 situation – now and in the future – for food production, agricultural and fishery/aquaculture supply chains and markets?
- How will the pandemic affect food demand?
- What is the connection between COVID-19 and animals?

See resources on: <http://www.fao.org/2019-ncov/q-and-a/en/>



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