

# GLOBAL HUNGER IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

The World Food Program projects that, without urgent action, the number of people facing food crises could double by the end of 2020.

Even before the outbreak of COVID-19, hunger was a major global problem.

- ▶ Hunger has been **increasing since 2015**. Nearly 2 billion people are still experiencing moderate to severe levels of food insecurity due to conflict, climate change, and economic downturns.
- ▶ In low- and middle-income countries, many households spend **half of their income** on food.
- ▶ Women are often disproportionately affected by hunger. **60% of hungry people and 76% of displaced people** in the world are women and girls. Women-headed households are most likely to suffer from food crises.
- ▶ This year, East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and portions of western and Southwest Asia have seen the **worst infestation** of crop-destroying locusts in 70 years. The United Nations (UN) estimates that this swarm is capable of consuming enough food to feed 34 million people and has dramatically increased food insecurity. The UN also predicts a **second wave** of locusts worsening food insecurity in East Africa, Yemen, and Iran.

## Current COVID-19 impacts on food security

- ▶ Essential food security and nutrition programs have been disrupted due to nationwide restrictions on movement and gatherings.
  - Nearly 1.6 billion children are out of school. Many children who depended on receiving **school meals** can no longer count on that food, though school-feeding programs like the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education Program, are adapting to provide children with take-home rations.
  - Community nutrition and food assistance **programs** cannot continue as usual.
- ▶ In some areas, the delivery of agricultural inputs and nutrition commodities is **delayed and more expensive** due to a shortage of air, sea, and ground transportation.



### DESERT LOCUST RESPONSE

Project Concern International (PCI), a Global Communities Partner, leads the USAID-funded Resilience in Pastoral Areas (RIPA) project supporting vulnerable pastoralist communities in Ethiopia's Southern lowlands.

RIPA is mobilizing its crisis modifier to support vulnerable households addressing the dual burden of COVID-19 and a desert locust outbreak. The planned multi-faceted response will address both challenges by promoting COVID-19 prevention awareness, while supporting the immediate and critical needs of vulnerable pastoralists' households. Planned interventions include providing unconditional cash transfers for food security and protecting livelihoods through the distribution of supplemental livestock feed and veterinary care vouchers.



### FOOD FOR PEACE ADAPTATIONS TO COVID-19

Save the Children is positioning its **Food for Peace** project in Niger to promote healthy water, sanitation, and hygiene practices through small, socially-distanced community trainings and via radio and television broadcasts and platforms such as WhatsApp. They are modifying food distribution to provide larger, longer-term rations for vulnerable families at specific time slots to avoid crowds and including hand-washing stations at distribution points.

## Current COVID-19 impacts on food security (cont.)

- ▶ Farmers are unable to receive the accurate and timely information they need to plant and harvest their crops. Crops and fresh produce are being **left in fields**, producing both food waste and income loss for farmers.
- ▶ **Closure of markets** means farmers have nowhere to sell their produce, and households now have limited places to purchase their food. Market vendors and others who work in the food system have also lost their main source of income.
- ▶ The poorest households are most vulnerable to increased hunger. In rural China, for example, households had **reduced purchasing power** due to the economic slowdown and income loss during the COVID-19 outbreak, therefore decreasing their ability to purchase nutrient-dense foods.
- ▶ While not widespread, rising food prices are also showing signs of increasing food waste, especially for fresh produce, based on reports from Sudan, Rwanda, China, and Vietnam.
- ▶ The ability of governments and researchers to collect data on household food security, nutrition, livelihoods, and other development indicators is compromised in many places. This will make it more difficult to design and target effective programs.
- ▶ Movement restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have limited responses to locusts in East Africa, where there has been a **slowdown** in delivery and production of internationally procured pesticides used to combat the swarms.
- ▶ According to local market **monitoring** by the World Food Program—and despite global commodity prices falling on average—at least 15 developing countries had experienced ‘severe’ price increases for staple foods (10% increase or greater) through March alone.

With market closures, movement restrictions, local food supply disruptions, and already high levels of poverty and hunger, low- and middle-income countries are **highly vulnerable** to dramatic increases in hunger and malnutrition due to COVID-19.

### FEED THE FUTURE ADAPTATIONS TO COVID-19



NCBA CLUSA’s project, **Feed the Future** Senegal Kawolor, is rapidly making available soap, liquid hand gel, bleach, disinfectant, and handwashing station materials for CultiVert agents to sell at a reduced price in project communities. Kawolor will support the transport and stocking of these products, and also provide training on hygiene practices in their communities.

Kawolor is supporting commune Citizen Working Groups, village Local Steering Committees, women’s groups, and health agents to educate their communities on COVID-19 through the Ministry of Health materials and messages broadcast by community radio stations.

### GLOBAL NUTRITION ADAPTATIONS TO COVID-19



In East Africa, Food for the Hungry (FH) is working to detect and mitigate severe acute malnutrition (also known as “wasting”) in young children—the leading underlying cause of death for children age five and below. In partnership with Food for Peace’s Development Food Security Activity, FH is utilizing the Care Group methodology in smaller, physically-distanced groups to ensure routine screenings for wasting and promote breastfeeding, essential household hygiene practices, and complementary feeding to communities in the DRC.

## Projected Impacts of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Populations

- ▶ COVID-19 is expected to drive up hunger, especially in countries already suffering from food crises—meaning food shortages already exist in addition to a high prevalence of acute malnutrition. The [World Food Program](#) projects that, without urgent action, the number of people facing food crises could double by the end of the year, increasing to 265 million people.
- ▶ COVID-19 poses the greatest threat to nations with [high burdens](#) of poverty and inadequate health systems. Most of the world's hungry people live in these same countries, and countries with already high rates of hunger are expected to see increases in hunger or greater exposure to the virus among people from food-insecure households who do not have the option of staying home.
  - Across the [29 countries](#) that FEWS NET monitors, an estimated 94 million people will require humanitarian food assistance in 2020—a 25% increase from 2019.
- ▶ The populations that will be most affected will be the poorest and most vulnerable, including displaced populations, migrants, people in fragile states, and those affected by conflict. These populations have few resources to cope with the impacts of COVID-19.
- ▶ The International Food Policy Research Institute [projects](#) that an additional 140 million people—including 80 million people in Africa and 42 million people in South Asia—could fall into extreme poverty this year. Economic decline, poverty, and food insecurity often accompany one another.
- ▶ Another [estimate](#) finds that 42 to 66 million children could fall into extreme poverty, and hundreds of thousands of children could die as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

### MCGOVERN-DOLE ADAPTATIONS TO COVID-19



In Guatemala, PCI has mobilized the [McGovern-Dole International Food for Education](#) and Child Nutrition program, EDUCAMOS, in adapting activities to COVID-19. With schools closed, EDUCAMOS has made commodities for meals available as take-home rations to help families maintain their children's nutrition. PCI is also working with the Government of Guatemala and Parent-Teacher Associations to support COVID-19 prevention and detection messaging in communities where EDUCAMOS is being implemented.

### FOOD FOR PROGRESS ADAPTATIONS TO COVID-19



In Burkina Faso, Lutheran World Relief-IMA World Health is utilizing mobile platforms developed for a USDA (Food for Progress) sesame project to disseminate SMS and radio messages created by the Burkina government to address COVID-19 prevention. The network reaches 19,000 sesame farmers throughout the country.

LWR-IMA is also using its Cacao Movil IT platform through a current multi-country Food for Progress project in Latin America to communicate with technicians and farmers about cocoa management, and provide advice on COVID-19 protection measures.

## Issues to Watch

- ▶ **Economic Slowdown.** Estimates suggest that for every 1% of economic slowdown globally, the number of **people** living in poverty increases by 2%—around 14 million people.
  - The main pathway of the expected impact on food security is through the loss of employment and income.
  - Since 2008, hunger has **increased** in many countries where the economy has slowed down or contracted. During the last global recession in 2008, poorer households spent up to 80% of their **income** to purchase food.
- ▶ **Lack of Coping Strategies or Resilience.** The wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19 will almost certainly increase hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition. The pandemic has highlighted the widespread lack of households' ability to cope with shocks and stresses. The need for resilience-focused programming—which helps families build their coping mechanisms—will only become greater moving forward.
  - The Western Africa Ebola virus epidemic (2013-2016) had lasting **impacts** on food and nutrition long after containment of the disease, especially for women and children.
  - COVID-19 is **increasing** women's caregiving burdens because children and the elderly are at home more often, and women are much more likely to be caring for the sick. This extra time devoted to caregiving limits time available for farming, impacting productivity.
  - Implications will manifest differently for vulnerable rural and urban populations. The **urban poor** will be particularly vulnerable. They often only have just enough money for basic necessities, and travel restrictions compromise the transport of supplies and functionality of open-air markets, where food is often purchased day-to-day.
- ▶ **Disruption of Food Supply Chains.** Closed borders, national lockdowns, and restrictions of movement are expected to impact **food supply chains** and, therefore, food access and availability.
  - Just as the major agricultural season is beginning, restrictions may prevent **seasonal laborers** from migrating and engaging in farm work. This could cause crop shortages and rising food prices.
  - Pastoralists' movements to find pasture or water may be limited, which could impact their livestock and cause conflict with farming communities.
- ▶ **Civil Unrest.** With vulnerable parts of the world at risk of sliding into famine as a result of COVID-19, it is likely that we will see waves of civil unrest, as was witnessed in 2007-08 when food price spikes sparked riots around the world. Now—more than ever—the world is witnessing the inextricable link between rising food insecurity, weak global health systems, and increasing levels of fragility.

### PREVIOUS PANDEMICS HAVE LED TO:



- Less **agricultural production**
- Limited access to agricultural inputs and markets
- Limited **trade**
- Higher prevalence of hunger and malnutrition
- Increased **food prices**