

COVID-19 and Protracted Crises

CSM Working Group on Monitoring the Use and Application of the CFS Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises

The COVID-19 pandemic had triggered a global economic and food supply crisis. People worldwide are experiencing crushing impacts of job loss due to lockdown measures, movement restrictions, and disrupted global food supply chains. For communities already experiencing protracted crises — such as armed conflict, occupation, natural disasters, and financial crisis — the pandemic is compounding the already difficult challenges they face in securing livelihoods and access to food.

Protracted crises are characterized not only by their longevity, but by their complexity, often consisting of multiple shorter, differing types of crises that occur recurrently, successively, or concurrently over a long period of time. Countries and regions in these contexts often struggle to recover, as the reconstruction and rehabilitation that normally transpires post-conflict or post-disaster is repeatedly delayed by yet another phase of crisis. The cumulative effects of such crises on livelihoods and food systems have a devastating impact on the socio-economic well-being of people experiencing them.

COVID-19 is yet another layer of crisis for such communities, and it is pushing many to the brink of famine and/or collapse. Many countries in crisis also become host to large numbers of refugees from other fragile countries, adding to the numbers of most vulnerable and marginalized people in their care. Governments in these contexts are particularly ill-equipped to provide the stopgap, emergency social measures seen in much of the North that have helped compensate for income losses.

In Haiti, which has long struggled to recover from multiple natural disasters amidst weak institutional capacity, the COVID-19 crisis has even further disrupted the already-suffering economy. Critically, Haiti has seen a substantial drop in remittances – which accounted for more than [38%](#) of the country's GDP in 2019 – since the pandemic hit, and a drop in the value of the local currency, exacerbating household food insecurity. Many people are now reported to have only one meal a day, and sometimes none at all, as most who earn their income as daily labourers are unable to work. Agricultural traders have been forced to stay home due to lockdowns and are unable to take food to markets, most of which have closed, impacting also the livelihoods of market workers, primarily women and youth. Rural areas have also experienced a rise in poverty as no measures have been put in place to help the agricultural sector function through this new crisis.

On July 1 2020 the UN Security Council unanimously adopted [resolution 2532](#), which expressed grave concern about the impact of COVID-19 “especially in countries ravaged by armed conflicts, or in post-conflict situations, or affected by humanitarian crises” and demanded “a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations.” Despite this call, fighting has continued in almost all contexts. Azad Jammu and Kashmir (officially part of Pakistan) is one example: people whose movement was already limited due to threat of armed conflict are now facing even greater barriers to mobility due to lockdowns. This is also contributing to a rise in food prices in local markets.

Fighting has continued also in Somalia, where combined with flooding, locusts, and now COVID-19 the poorest and most marginalized groups are feeling the brunt of the impact, particularly in income loss and purchasing power. In Balochistan (officially part of Pakistan), periodic fighting has often caused related periodic drops in demand for agricultural products, as people are less likely to risk leaving their homes. With the added pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic and more people staying at home, the combined crises have all but destroyed the agricultural sector. Farmers are suffering, reporting long delays in accessing agricultural inputs (too late for the needs of the growing season), and demand has decreased even further due to lockdown, meaning that many are unable to sell their produce.

More than half of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide do not live in camps, but rather in cities and towns of their host countries where they do not normally receive the same official support as those in camps. They gravitate to these urban areas in search of work and the prospect of starting a better life. Yet refugees and IDPs are extremely vulnerable in terms of job security, with most working in the informal sector or as daily labourers. In Bangladesh, the Rohingya urban refugee community have been some of the hardest hit in terms of job loss and hunger. In Pakistan, Afghans whose documents identify them as refugees do not have access to the formal labour market, forcing them into precarious, informal work. Most workers in home rubbish-removal in Karachi are Afghan refugees, who rely on the generosity of community members to provide them with food. During the pandemic these workers have largely been forced to stay home due to lockdown, losing their access to food and income

In Athens, Greece, informal social kitchens providing meals to people who need them —many of them refugees and displaced persons — have experienced an up to five-fold surge in demand since the COVID crisis began. People working in these kitchens have reported that refugees are being referred to these small grassroots initiatives, which rely on community donations, by large humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR.

Humanitarian supply chains have not been spared from the impacts of COVID-19 disruptions. Yemen, one of the most urgent cases of food insecurity in the world today, and still very much at risk of widespread famine, was already experiencing blockades impacting food imports due to ongoing armed conflict. Global pandemic-related lockdown measures have exacerbated that situation, resulting in a shocking 39% additional decline in imports in April 2020. Food prices have increased by 35% in some areas since the start of the pandemic, which, coupled with decreased remittances and a decline in value of the local currency, has severely impacted purchasing power for food. In a country where more than 80% of people rely on food aid, humanitarian agencies are currently facing a \$1 billion funding shortage, which has already resulted in the termination of some food aid projects. There are fears that as wealthier donor countries turn inwards to offer support to their own populations during the pandemic, drops in foreign assistance many persist for years to come, with devastating impacts.

Uganda hosts more refugees than any other country in Africa, and also saw one of the strictest lockdowns over the first several months of the pandemic. Movement restrictions and airport closures impacted refugees who depend on food aid the most, as organizations like the Red Cross were unable to mobilize food or even to deliver the food they already had in stock.

In the context of repeated natural disasters and home to nearly a quarter-million IDPs, Myanmar relies heavily on trade with China to sustain its needs. Due to the border closure at the start of the pandemic, virtually all economic activity has come to a halt. The livelihoods of many people,

including agricultural workers and IDPs who work as day labourers, are dependent on this trade, and have been some most economically impacted in the country.

Fisherfolk in countries like Algeria and Bangladesh have also reported livelihood disruptions due to pandemic-related regulations, which have made fishing less profitable. Drops in demand, inability to transport fresh product, and lack of adequate storage facilities have resulted in steep declines in income, hitting small-scale food producers the hardest.

Syria, a once food self-sufficient country, has become dependent on food imports and food aid since the start of the civil war in 2011. The country has seen a three-fold increase in the cost of food in the past year as its currency lost significant value, leading to diminishing purchasing power. Availability of food has also declined, both as a result of the failing economy and pandemic-related closures of food-producing enterprises and markets. COVID-19 is proving to be the tipping point for many families, especially those who have lost income during the pandemic, with approximately [1.4 million](#) additional people becoming food insecure just within a six-month period earlier this year. Sanctions imposed by the U.S. earlier this year through the Caesar's Act will only further harm the economic situation.

Lebanon has long been heavily reliant on food imports. Prior to the pandemic, the country already faced disruptions to its supply chains caused by informal U.S. sanctions, including via the Caesar's Act in Syria. Like Syria, Lebanon is also experiencing a devastating economic crisis that includes a rapidly depreciating currency and a shortage of foreign funds. The sudden drop in purchasing power is leading middle-class families to rely on food banks, while farmers have been unable to afford agricultural inputs. The added pressure of COVID-19 disruptions, including trade restrictions applied by some food exporting countries, has further reduced availability, leading many farmers to lose their jobs. Unemployment, which was already high, has increased since the pandemic, with the highest burden being felt by daily earners and those without work or social support networks, many of them Syrian and Palestinian refugees. On August 4th, a devastating explosion at the port of Beirut decimated the large grain silos that held much of the country's national reserves. The loss of infrastructure will also impact Lebanon's ability to accept imported goods, 90% of which previously came through the port.

Consistently in protracted crises, and even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic, people living in these fragile situations report that local agricultural production has been a saving grace. In occupied Palestine, both government and local civil society organizations distributed seeds in addition to food aid as a way to encourage home gardens, which they know facilitate access to healthy food. Many crops in Gaza had to be destroyed in the early months of the pandemic as markets were not functioning normally and farmers had no way to sell their produce. Increased trade restrictions and disruptions throughout occupied Palestine impacted the ability to import needed agricultural inputs and to export Palestinian produce. Emergency measures also forced farmers to sell their goods at nominal prices, causing them to lose income or stop farming altogether, creating a shortage of some essential foodstuffs in Gaza. Farmers also faced increased difficulty in accessing their farmland, a combination of pandemic-related movement restrictions and restrictions imposed by occupying Israeli forces around the buffer zone on Gaza's perimeter.

In Burkina Faso, which experiences periodic terrorism and banditry, and hosts nearly one million refugees and IDPs, peri-urban food producers have been able to maintain their livelihoods in an otherwise disrupted food system by making home deliveries in urban areas when markets were closed due to lockdowns. These mutually beneficial short regional supply chains are supporting both farmer livelihoods and the food and nutritional needs of urban communities. Meanwhile,

market sellers that depended on food brought from further away have lost their jobs, as transporting food became impossible, and large amounts of fresh food were wasted. The significant income losses and market closures led to climbing poverty rates, especially among the most vulnerable, and increased malnutrition among IDPs.

In addition to the growing awareness of the benefits of and need for local agricultural, people living in protracted crises are also noticing the failures of their states to maintain a healthy, functioning local production system. Lebanon has ample farmland that could be exploited or reclaimed, but lack of support by consecutive governments has resulted in a weak, fragile agricultural sector, including structural weakness in processing of local agricultural foods. Gaps in training and extension are filled by the private sector, and production is carried out in an uncoordinated way, without examination of consumption needs of the country or sustainability factors. Notably, despite the country's long history of recurring conflict, Lebanon has long lacked a plan that would ensure the survival of agriculture in the country during a protracted crisis.

The CFS Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (FFA) was developed to address the specific challenges and needs of communities in situations of protracted crises. The FFA acknowledges the importance of "strengthening sustainable local food systems, fostering access to productive resources and to markets that are remunerative and beneficial to smallholders" (Principle 1), and underscores also the need "to ensure the protection of those affected or at risk" while "upholding Human Rights obligations and International Humanitarian Law" (Principle 4) as a way to safeguard the food and nutritional needs of communities who are living through crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need to adhere to such guidelines and work to build stronger food systems both in contexts of protracted crises, and around the world.