



Key impacts, issues, systemic shocks



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This review provides an overview of literature and other online resources that are written and produced on COVID-19 and its impacts on agriculture. While there are many resources available on the subject, angles can be fragmented, making it hard to find a narrative to make sense of the situation. This bimonthly newsletter provides a starting point. Here you will find a summary of the international discussions in 5 main areas; a selection of key resources; plus a long-list of interesting resources on 5 food system areas/dimensions.

Introduction

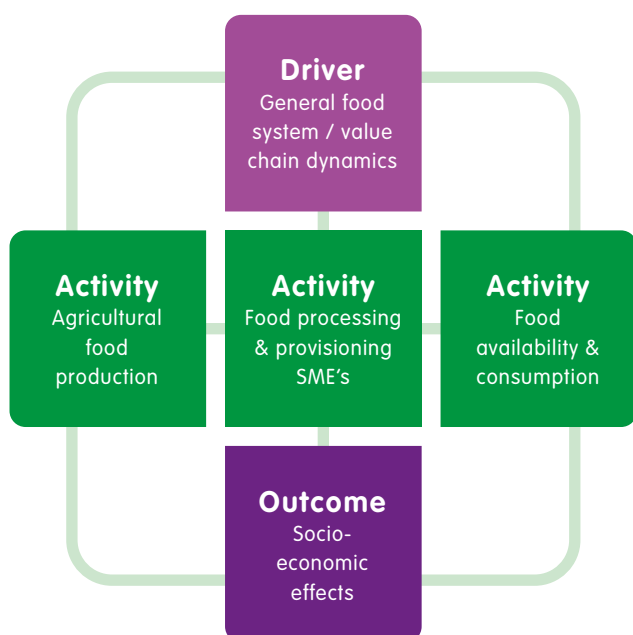
This literature review focuses on the impacts that COVID-19 measures have on agricultural value chains. The chapters in the review can be mapped across the food systems graph on the left.


Health and hygiene dimensions

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted important health- and hygiene-related impacts for agricultural value chains. Several key resources can be consulted.

Key resources

- Interim guidance: **WHO & FAO:** [COVID-19 and Food Safety: Guidance for Food Businesses.](#)
- Blogpost: **IFPRI – Bett et al.** (2020) [Africa's growing risk of diseases that spread from animals to people: on zoonotic diseases and future pandemics.](#)
- **CARE:** [The Impact of COVID-19 on Food and Water Systems: how COVID-19 is affecting livelihoods and health of smallholder farmers and threats to WASH.](#)





General food system value chain dynamics

Driver: context

This crisis is emphasizing where current food systems are robust and resilient to severe shocks and where there are structural weaknesses. The resources point to differentiated impacts on mechanisms and activities in current food systems, as well as differences in kind and depth of impact for different actor groups. This area highlights the dynamics resulting from global and local interconnectedness, and points to a range of cause/effect ripples that are important to understand when considering where to act in addressing acute effects and short-term or structural causes.

Key findings

- The COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating an already fragile food security context in sub-Saharan Africa and is occurring alongside other crises, such as climate change, crop shortages, conflicts and economic downturns. The vulnerability of large numbers of households facing several shocks at the same time is expected to lead to a large increase in the numbers of hungry and vulnerable people in Africa. Progress towards SDGs is being set back by a decade or more in many countries (see FAO, WUR, OECD).
- Around the world, COVID-19 disruptions to food supply chains are leading to promising innovations. This shows concerted, creative and cross-sectoral intervention is needed and possible to get food systems working for better diets and distribution. These innovations point to the importance of involving government, communities, businesses and partnerships (see Blogpost Corinna Hawkes).

Key resources

- **FAO** '[Keeping food and agricultural systems alive: analyses and solutions in response to COVID-19](#)': extensive overview of the impact of COVID-19 on agri-food systems in sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Blogpost:** Corinna Hawkes, Centre for Food Policy: '[COVID-19 and the promise of food system innovation](#)': examples of food system innovation during COVID-19.
- **WUR** '[Rapid country assessments](#)': the effects of COVID-19 on food systems as a whole in Mali, Ethiopia and Kenya.
- **OECD** Policy responses to coronavirus '[When a global virus meets local realities: COVID-19 in West-Africa](#)': contextual overview of pre-existing vulnerabilities and cross-cutting impacts of COVID-19.
- **1D4D Afrique (French)**: '[Quand Le Covid-19 Révèle La Fragilité Des Systèmes Alimentaires Urbains](#)': article sur la nécessité de renforcer la résilience des systèmes alimentaires, notamment dans les villes qui sont particulièrement affectées en Afrique.

Key websites

- **IFPRI** [Policy Response Portal \(CPR\) Dashboard](#): policy responses to COVID-19, including trade, farm and social protection policies.
- **AGRA** [COVID-19 Situation Reports](#): situation reports for Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique and Tanzania.



Agricultural food production

Activity: farming

Initial indications of the impact of the COVID-19 measures show travel restrictions are inhibiting extension services and labourers from reaching production sites, in some cases resulting in loss of harvests, particularly for perishables. Resources point to the importance of ensuring that good use is made of critical production windows, by ensuring that essential production inputs are available on time for land preparation, sowing, etc. This crisis further highlights Africa's dependency on imports for necessary inputs, such as fertilizer and seed. The impact on current and future seasons and yields is often unclear, but worrisome.

Key findings

- Many smallholder farmers rely on rural infrastructure, local input markets and government extension services and donor programs for their livelihoods. For these rural households, the indirect economic impact of COVID-19 may pull them further into extreme poverty, as many smallholder farmers are vulnerable to financial shocks and do not have high levels of savings (see RAF Learning Lab pathways).
- Smallholder farmers produce up to 80% of the food consumed in Africa, which makes it critical to safeguard agricultural input supply mechanisms. COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing obstacles for smallholders in accessing necessary inputs and extension services (see CARE; FAO & African Union).
- The COVID-19 measures have disproportionately affected the ability of pastoralists to carry out their economic activities. Their reliance on formal markets to sell livestock and ability to travel, makes this group particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 shut-downs (see APESS, J-PAL blogpost).

Key resources

- **FAO & African Union** [‘Safeguarding input supply chains for small-scale agricultural producers in the context of COVID-19 in Africa’](#): challenges and proposed actions for mitigating impacts on input supply for small-scale producers in Africa.
- **RAF Learning Lab** COVID-19 emergency briefings pathway 1: [‘Vulnerable households at the edge of the pandemic’](#) and pathway 2: [‘High-risk households dependent on, and critical for, food supply’](#): briefing series on the experiences of smallholders and recommendations for action, building on the ‘2019 Pathways to Prosperity’ report.
- **CARE** [‘Solutions to keep agricultural inputs flowing in crisis: program learning during COVID-19’](#): on exacerbated obstacles for smallholder farmers in accessing agro-inputs during COVID-19.
- Blogpost: **J-PAL** [‘Pastoralism in the COVID-19 era’](#): disruptions to Kenyan pastoralist livelihoods, based on an ILRI & CGIAR study [‘Impacts of COVID-19 on Pastoralists in Kenya’](#)
- **APESS** (French) [‘Bulletin mensuel de veille sur la vulnérabilité des exploitations agropastorales membres de l’APESS’](#): monitoring bulletin highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on family farms and agro-pastoral communities in West Africa.

Key websites

- **IFDC** [Africa Fertilizer Watch Dashboard](#): impact on the African fertilizer market.
- **IFPRI** [COVID-19 Policy Response Portal \(CPR\)](#): ‘Farm policies’



Food processing and provisioning

Activity: SME's

The impacts of COVID-19 on the operational conditions of SMEs is part of what Reardon et al. (AGRA, 2019) call the “Hidden Middle” – massive numbers of small operators responding in a highly dynamic manner to each season’s needs and opportunities, but largely ‘hidden’ from public policy discussions and (formal) investors. Transport restrictions are negatively impacting business continuity, as closures of borders, shops and markets impede food provisioning services. Processors face reduced opening hours and an increased number of sick employees. Moreover, SMEs are facing financial hardship, as access to finance is insufficient and conditions for loan repayment have worsened. With an estimated 80% of food produced for local consumption sold by SMEs in Africa, the current crisis is revealing the importance of measures aimed at keeping these businesses alive and running.

Key findings

- According to an online survey on the impact of Covid-19 on mostly micro- and small-sized firms, conducted by GAIN early May 2020, 94% of 363 respondents reported being impacted by the Covid-19 measures. This impact manifested mainly via decreased sales (82%), difficulty accessing inputs (49%), and difficulty paying staff (44%).
- The supply and distribution of inputs for agri-SMEs has been severely disrupted by both international and domestic travel restrictions. This includes inputs such as seeds and fertilizer for commercial farms, and raw materials for processors. The travel restrictions and risk of the virus have also impeded the availability of labour (see RAF Learning Lab pathways; AGRA).

Key resources

- **GAIN** Situation reports I, II and III + survey ‘Impacts of COVID-19 on Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in the Food System’: primary data showing the experiences of SMEs, including insights from Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Mozambique and Tanzania.
- **RAF Learning lab** COVID-19 emergency briefing series pathway 4: ‘Agri-SMEs operating in uncertain financial, operational, and supply chain conditions’ and pathway 5: ‘Rural, informal micro-entrepreneurs at the heart of community resilience’: briefing series on the experiences of agri-SMEs and recommendations for action, building on the ‘2019 Pathways to Prosperity’ report.
- **FAO** ‘Africa’s youth in agrifood systems: innovation in the context of COVID-19’: impacts and policy recommendations for young agri-entrepreneurs.
- **TechnoServe** ‘Challenges and responses for Africa’s food processors facing COVID-19’: primary data on the challenges of COVID-19 for processing businesses.
- **CIRAD** Article (French) ‘Covid-19 & Sécurité alimentaire – Des pertes alimentaires accrues en Afrique’: vue d’ensemble des faiblesses de la chaîne d’approvisionnement.

Additional reading

- **AGRA** ‘Africa Agriculture Status Report 2019: The Hidden Middle, a quiet revolution in the private sector driving agricultural transformation’: *background reading on the indispensable role of SMEs in the agricultural value chain in Africa.*
- COVID-19 is creating even more financing pressure for agri-SMEs. Approximately six weeks into the crisis, a survey of 43 of 2SCALE’s private sector partners in Africa found that 39% experienced difficulties paying off loans, 23% have been forced to let go some of their employees, and 8% have closed their operations entirely (see RAF Learning Lab pathways; AGRA).



Food availability, affordability, utilisation and consumption

Activity: consumption

Across Africa, increased demand for non-perishables and decreased demand for perishables is seen as consumers prioritize staples, leading to price increases for staple products. Increased prices and decreased opportunities for economic activity – particularly in the informal sector – are threatening the ability for households to buy nutritious foods, leading to concerns that this global health crisis could lead to a global food and nutrition crisis in the months and years to come.

Key findings

- Across Africa, FAO and WFP analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic impact identified 15 countries as hunger hotspots, including Nigeria, Mali and Ethiopia. Some of the driving factors triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic that are pushing people into severe hunger conditions are reduced household purchasing power that is impacting on food access, disruptions in supply chains affecting the movement of food to areas of needs and movement of inputs to production areas, limited safety nets to protect the vulnerable populations, and multiple existing risks such as persistent armed conflict and insecurity (see AGRA Food Security Monitor).
- Lower than normal food consumption levels continue, suggesting the ability to purchase food across sub-Saharan Africa has declined, possibly due to lower incomes as a result of the impact of COVID-19. Most countries covered in the report have food supplies that exceed domestic consumption, suggesting that most people in these countries are faced with a food consumption crisis due to physical and economic barriers (see AGRA Food Security Monitor; RPCA/CILSS; UN Habitat/WFP).

Key resources

- **AGRA Food Security Monitor** (Edition #5 - latest): overview of the prices of main food staples and food security outlook in East-West- and Southern Africa.
- **RPCA & CILSS** (French), Le Réseau de Prévention des Crises Alimentaires 'Impact de la crise de Covid-19 sur la sécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest, no. 03' : situation report on the food security outlook in West Africa.
- **UN Habitat & WFP** 'Impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods, food security & nutrition in East Africa : Urban Focus': insights on the impact of COVID-19 on the food security situation of urban populations in East Africa.
- Publication: **Chege et al.** (2020) 'Impact of COVID-19 on diets of poor consumers in Africa: evidence from the slums of Nairobi, Kenya': primary data on the impacts on diets of poor slum dwellers and middle-income non-slum dwellers in Nairobi, Kenya.
- Working paper: **IFPRI – Abate et al.** (2020) 'Food and nutrition security in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia during COVID-19': primary data on changes in household food and nutrition security during COVID-19 in Ethiopia.

Key websites

- **WFP World Hunger Map Dashboard**: prevalence of undernourishment globally.
- **WFP COVID-19 Situation reports**: updates on actions taken by the WFP in response to COVID-19.
- The vulnerable poor, especially those in the urban areas, are likely to feel a bigger impact. The study by Chege et al. (2020) analyses effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumption of nutritious foods (including fresh fruits and vegetables and animal source foods) and diets of poor slum dwellers and middle-income non-slum dwellers in Nairobi, Kenya, using primary data collected from 2,465 households between April and May 2020. About 90% of households in the slums reported dire food insecurity situations. They were not able to eat the kind of foods they preferred, they ate a limited variety of foods, a smaller meal than they felt they needed and fewer number of meals in a day.



Overall socio-economic effects

Outcome

The COVID-19 crisis has a profound effect on individuals, households and communities. Globally, a massive, extremely quick loss of employment is seen to threaten people's livelihoods and affect households' purchasing power. The literature points to highly differentiated impacts on different actor groups – such as youth and female-headed households – who have different capacities to cope with the current situation. Women in general, due to their lead role in feeding families, combined with greater negative impact on their income earning possibilities, are suffering from physical and mental health impacts. Responses put in place to mitigate impacts need to have a more granular understanding of these differences to be relevant and appropriate.

Key findings

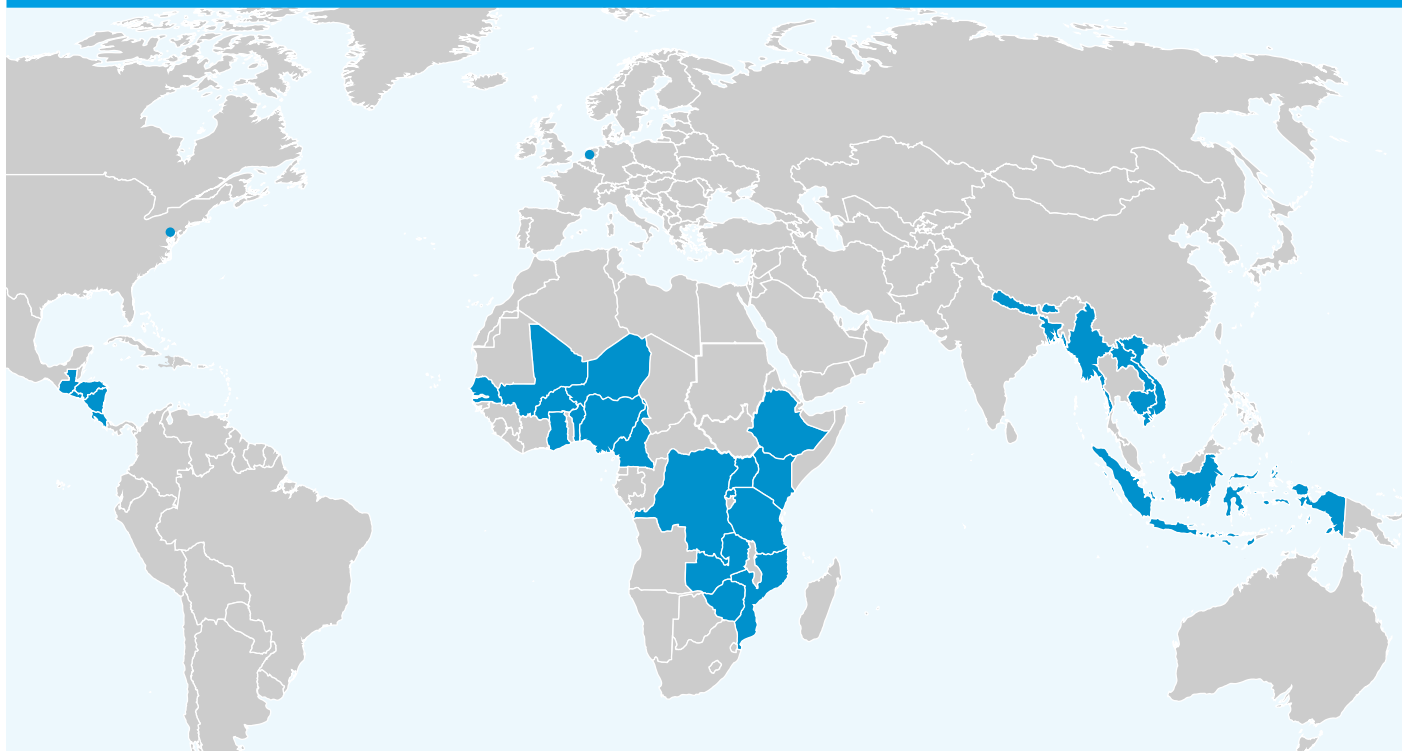
- COVID-19 measures are exacerbating economic vulnerabilities across Africa. As food prices rise and purchasing power lowers, urban and informal workers are at the forefront of impacted groups. Many informal workers have been forced to drastically reduce their economic activities or have had to shut down entirely. As 80% of employment in Africa is estimated to be in the informal sector, these impacts are critical (see Mercy Corps; FAO; JeuneAfrrique).
- Restrictions on business operations and trade have significant effects on people's ability to work, with massive loss of employment and wages across formal and informal sectors as a result. This is projected to have a profound impact on the number of people living in poverty, with particular concerns for youth. There are calls to extend social protection coverage significantly (see OECD).

Key resources

- Impact report: **Mercy Corps** 'Global Rapid Market Impact report on economic and food security impacts of local policy responses': *primary data on the initial impacts of COVID-19 globally, including data from Ethiopia and Uganda.*
- **FAO** 'Impact of Covid-19 on informal workers' : *impacts and policy recommendations for informal workers in agri-food systems.*
- **FAO** 'Migrant workers and remittances in the context of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa': *prospective decline in remittances will impact African economies.*
- **OECD** 'COVID-19 and Africa: socio-economic implications and policy responses': includes vulnerabilities of the informal workforce and policy recommendations.
- **JeuneAfrrique** (French) 'Coronavirus: les dernières infos économiques africaines': *retrouvez ici une sélection des dernières informations, régulièrement mise à jour, sur les conséquences économiques du coronavirus sur le continent.*

Key websites

- **Surgo Foundation** Africa COVID-19 community vulnerability index Dashboard: *vulnerability index to inform COVID-19 planning and response.*
- **FMT** COVID-19 Tracking survey status: *primary data on a range of impacts of COVID-19, including data from Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.*
- Migrant workers are affected disproportionately, as they often have to deal with precarious working conditions and overcrowded living and transport arrangements, often informally. Moreover, a 23% decline in remittances is seen to negatively impact economies in sub-Saharan Africa (see FAO).



Resource collection:

96 resources were identified as particularly insightful for the context in which the CORE lead projects operate. In the selection, specific attention was paid to region (West-/East-/sub-Saharan Africa) and sectors (of which horticulture and livestock featured most often).

The overview below provides summaries of the key areas in these sources, as well as an indication of the key resources or websites to consult.

For an overview of all relevant resources per area see spreadsheet – tab '[COVID-19 and Agriculture Review](#)'. For an overview of the websites with aggregated resources consulted for this review, see spreadsheet – tab '[aggregated resources](#)'.

Colophon

This review is published by the [COVID Response and Resilience Initiative \(CORE - Africa\)](#) - SNV Netherlands Development Organisation in cooperation with Wageningen University & Research.

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