

Covid-19 Response Task Force Minutes
Analytical work: Sharing content and coordination of requests to institutions.
30 April 2020

Participants

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4. Karen Johnson - DFID
5. Oriane Barthélemy - France (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs)
6. Laura Khiari Loubière - France (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs)
7. Sanna-Liisa Taivalmaa – Finland (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
8. David Hegwood – USAID (and Donor Platform Co-Chair)
9. Chris Hillbruner - USAID
10. Jennifer Chow - USAID
11. Anna Friedemann-Pfautsch - BMZ
12. Ammad Bahalim – Gates Foundation
13. Alan Rennison – Gates Foundation
14. Neil Watkins – Gates Foundation
15. Nikita Eriksen – Hamel – Global Affairs Canada
16. Paolo Enrico Sertoli - Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)
17. Marco Platzer – AICS
18. Federica De Gaetano – AICS
19. Ueli Mauderli - SDC
20. Daniel Van Gilst – Norad
21. Elwyn Grainger-Jones - CGIAR
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Secretariat

1. Maurizio Navarra - IFAD
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3. Joerg Lohmann - GIZ
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Main decisions:

- **Development of a common set of priority questions to research institutions:** Most donors agree that a list of priority questions would be useful: The first step would be to reach out to these institutions to clarify what questions they are working on, and the information collected so far. Proposed organizations to potentially reach out to include FAO, CGAIR, IFPRI, World Bank, World Food Programme, G20, EU, GIZ; OECD; Civil Societies e.g. Oxfam; Regional bodies such as ECOWAS, ASEAN.
- **Next meeting:** The next meeting will be in two weeks' time and will focus on country deep-dives. Members are encouraged to reach out to GDWG secretariat of the Chair to let them know what issue should be included on the agenda.
- **Country deep dive and inventory of ongoing activities:** Questions remain on how best to undertake this activity in terms of spatial scales. The Chair and the secretariat will continue with this discussion offline and propose a possible way forward to the group
- **Role of the secretariat:** Secretariat is ready to assist in scoping of ongoing activities pending approval from the board. There is thus an urgent need of coming up with a request to the board after which the secretariat will act immediately. There will be follow up discussions within the Platform's board on how to go about it and the decision reached will be communicated to the broader group.

1. Opening

The chair opened the meeting by welcoming all participants and recapped on the first Covid-19 donor response meeting organized by DFID on 8 April, noting that three important issues were raised for further discussion (analytics, country deep-dives and scalable action), informing the agenda for this second meeting. The two primary goals of this conversation are:

- Promote an exchange on where everyone is getting their information from, where they are (status quo), and what is happening internationally (i.e. on other platforms and ongoing initiatives), aiming to make the information available for coordinating policy decisions in the light of the COVID-19 crisis;
- Discuss how to better coordinate donor's initiatives and requests to international research organizations, for improved evidence-based decision-making.

2. Analytical work on COVID-19 and food security, including the IFPRI coordination example

CGIAR took the floor, providing the group with an overview on what needs to be done analytically in the coming months; reviewing existing challenges and the actions the donors can take to better coordinate information gathering. The main points highlighted are as follows:

Due to the speed in which the crisis unfolds, policymakers have been put under pressure to make quick decisions. As such, various stakeholders including funding agencies, governments, and researchers must gain access to the best data available, as quickly as possible. It is necessary to actualize the information and avoid too many bilateral projects, by making use of existing multilateral bodies to limit duplication. There is an idea to create a Covid19 hub by IFPRI that will help in navigating information and supporting collective action. The themes in demand are numerous, some of which were identified and discussed:



- **Health** – There is a need for more research into how the effects of COVID-19 impinge on the systems. There is currently a lot of epidemiological work around animal health, including around microbial resistance in the context of the One Health initiative.
- **Food distribution** – There is a need to better analyse trends in food markets, the impact on livelihoods, consumer behavior, food choices, humanitarian food, income, social protection questions, food system resilience and food market responses (there is a great deal of work around trade barrier for example the IFPRI trade barrier tracker).

Some work dealing with similar issues has already been done, and there is an opportunity to repurpose existing capacity or tools. Example was provided on the Agriculture for Nutrition and Health initiative (A4NH) as a concrete programme by CGIAR. CGIAR is making use of their existing portfolio and examining what to repurpose, what has already been done, what needs to be done differently, and what are the additional steps to take in this situation. There is some great work being carried out across multilateral agencies, for example the recent FAO publication that looks at the impacts of food systems and the vulnerability index per country. However, such efforts remain often fragmented, mainly because of high transaction costs associated to a coordinated approach. There is added value in bringing together different actors within the multilateral system, and the information such system generates. The creation of a “central hub” can play an important role in coordinating the efforts undertaken by the broad range of organizations and institutions.

CGIAR seeks to play a convening role with partners, by assessing what the research needs are and especially playing an emerging role in how they can strengthen their capacity to ensure that the existing analyses and products are used by those that need it. There is a need to keep the discussion ongoing and create connections between this crisis and any other crisis that might emerge, for instance, the climate crisis.

The Netherlands: Inquired if CGIAR’s current work includes modelling for different scenarios, taking into the consideration the potential duration of the current lock down.

CGIAR: The situation, in particular the duration and extent of the current lockdown, is all a “guesswork” for the time being. The analysis will therefore be scenario-based. There is a concern about responding to the demands, while governments are in lockdown. Somehow during this crisis, the bandwidth to receive information is quite low. There is a need to work harder than usual to make usable, practicable, and digestible information. The information must be tailored around use, and we need to keep in mind how national governments can respond.

Gates Foundation: Prior to the Covid-19 crisis, the Gates Foundation was working with IFPRI to set up a series of models aiming to stack rank policies and public investments for driving inclusive agricultural transformation. They are now in the process of adapting these models to 8 countries, mostly from Africa and the models are close to being able to articulate the different lock down scenarios and policy priorities in both the short and long run. Such models could provide a base to respond to country demands for policy prioritization.

Norad: Inquired about how the different studies currently being done by IFPRI are being funded, the extent to which IFPRI coordinates with FAO.

CGIAR: The funding comes mainly from proposals to funders, and there are other interested funders. Discussions on whether existing funds can be repurposed specifically for this pandemic will take place



in the Council meetings. IFRI is currently doing a lot of this work through A4NH and are seeking additional funding to do deep-dive country studies which have three areas of focus:

- **Modeling:** Using global, regional-based scenario analysis to understand impacts on policy responses;
- **Country deep dive:** A more country-specific deep dive looking on exposure to national impacts and international risks;
- **Surveillance:** Monitoring food prices, the dietary diversity in nutrition, gender, and income, access to public services, early warning systems in place

There is a strong collaboration among CGIAR centers to support countries in their policy responses for this crisis. For example, in Bangladesh various agencies have worked together to develop a set of proposals on how they can support the country, by analysing the economic and food security impacts associated with Covid-19 and continuing their support to farmers to maintain food production. Systematic coordination with other agencies is essential to minimize duplication and competition. CGIAR Research Program (CRP) mechanisms can help in this regard. The mechanism can develop into a CRP pool funding, through which funds can be channeled, instead of through bilateral projects.

Chair: From the donors' side, there is urgency and pressure to justify their agricultural support and other programmes from an emergency perspective. He inquired about CGIAR's view about this aspect from a repurposing aspect, given the urgency and short time frame.

CGIAR: There is a risk of having a great programme that takes long to be implemented and yield results, and therefore misses out on the key policy decisions happening around. The causes and the scale of this crisis are quite unique, but the emerging issues are not that new. There has been a lot of research work around access issues, nutrition, and public subsidy programmes. Such work can be repackaged to make it more accessible and relevant to our partners. This will circumvent an elaborate peer-review process, because the tools have already been built and their analysis already done. For new work areas, we need to be more careful and speed up the supply chain. A lot of the questions right now are on how to repurpose our analytical models to get some answers. There must be a longer-run dimension to this crisis, as it characterizes the lack of resilience of many of our interconnected systems. Introducing a long-term dimension into research agenda will also look at the inabilities to manage risk sufficiently.

3. Focus areas for analysis

Gates foundation: With IFPRI, they were already working on detailed modeling piece, with a view to creating a set of practical and focused tools to enable the country governments to think through their policy priorities. After the Covid-19 outbreak, it was easy to tailor the tools to practical realities that the governments are facing (although limited to a few countries). However, these tools still have some shortcomings. They are looking into opportunities for greater integration of different tools within IFPRI. So, their focus right now is modelling and the country deep dives. The models yield excellent results in countries where IFPRI has a decent presence, government relationships, and strategy support programs. IFPRI is already interacting with governments in certain instances and these short-term engagements with governments set the stage for the greater use of these tools in the coming years.

Prioritization is important now, as countries try to figure out their responses and recovery. Basically, they support all smallholders that are working with IFPRI including the impact modeling. There are different teams in IFPRI working on different issues, from policy prioritization to adapting agriculture



to climate change. All these models can be tweaked in some meaningful way to try and answer different aspects of the Covid-19 response for a variety of audiences. As donors think of coordinating with IFPRI on different projects, it is important for them to also consider the different audience needs.

CGIAR: They are currently working on a response paper to be presented to the Council. Key technical questions that need to be answered include who their key audiences/markets are, how to bring the models together, how to “multilateralise” the scale, and what the core scenarios are.

Chair: The situation demands a coordinated response guided by national governments. Questions remain on how donors are going to be guided, given the possibility of varied responses in this crisis both in the short and long term, and appropriate modelling that will yield urgent measures for countries. So far, the social safety net scheme to getting income back into these countries is quite clear, but there are also aspects related to production (logistics and access to inputs), access to nutrition and keeping the markets open, which are all issues needing to be looked at.

Gates Foundation: The models cannot answer every foreseeable question now; they still need a lot of work, and they should be made available in the near future, maybe in 6 months. But in the short term, it is possible to run different scenarios that can guide policy measures.

CGIAR: Models need to interact with policy discussions to yield some policy responses. Challenge is how to make information on all innovations assessable to countries. There is a need for a real-time information hub on who is doing what at a given time to respond to which challenge.

DFID: The most significant challenge that they see now is twofold: (i) There is a lot of evidence coming from previous crises, but it is still unclear on what can be used, because of the level of comparability. This is part of the larger question: What do we know and what is unknown. There is a lot of conjecture, and they are working on unravelling “what is known from what is unknown”. (ii) Another challenge is time: given the speed with which things are evolving, we could still be debating on the selection of indicators for a comparable model next year. So, there might be a lost opportunity of reacting on time. The pressure remains on how to get to actionable policy on time without falling back on the conjecture.

The Netherlands have the same challenges.

USAID: Restated that the analytical streams for Covid-19 is a critical area for coordination. Pre-Covid, they worked a lot with IFPRI on analytics. There is a need to figure out how to move forward within the COVID space to identify the core issues. Coordination from the IFPRI side is very critical. Couple of challenges from their side include: How to understand and track better what everyone is doing and the areas for complimentary contribution, how to collect, repackage information for different audiences, access all that is going on and coordinate analysis. Each donor tends to have more information on what they are interested in, but it should be balanced with countries’ needs. There are different analytical and temporal buckets to take into consideration: Short term impact (complimentary contribution to the humanitarian side of things) and medium to long-term impact.

CGIAR: They are working on creating a taxonomy that puts issues into different buckets to know what the main lines of responses are. After identifying the different buckets alongside partners, the remaining challenge will be how to create easy access to the available information. Question remains if there is a way of pulling together the existing information and making it more accessible. The main priority now is easier access to the right information in the proper format for policymakers.



Canada: They share the same concerns mentioned by other donors, especially on the management of huge volumes of information and getting a sense of what others are doing. Initial reaction was to focus on areas where they already have existing footprints. With this regard, they are looking at how to reprofile projects, and reallocate funding priorities. They did a media scan on all available documents/information so far on Covid-19, and they are trying to synthesize it down to inform core policy advice. Challenge goes beyond identifying policy responses. The urgency of this pandemic raises the need for solutions including the involvement of non-traditional actors; this crisis has highlighted the importance of the global architecture and raised questions on how to identify its weaknesses, and strengths. The results will build up to the Food System Summit.

4. Additional Challenges (Where do we get information from and what is already done and what needs to be done)

Gates Foundation: Analytical burden has been put on specific institutions due to the high volume of demands. These institutions might be overwhelmed on how best to prioritize these needs during this crisis. There is a need for donors to think about new potential instruments that will provide support to such analytical needs, and the need to align projects. A potential tool would be to have a fund that research institutions, such as FAO and CGIAR can tap in to support analytics and respond to donors' needs. He proposed that donors agree, at least at a very high level, on a certain set of common questions or figure out a mechanism through which their technical needs will be addressed.

Netherlands: Would be useful to have a common set of joint questions to put forward to the different institutions, but there is a need to consider the different audiences and donors' policies and working areas. There is also a need to discuss the processes that follows such an analysis.

BMZ: On one hand, it is useful to have a common set of questions from donors. However, on the other hand, it is important to consider the different contexts in the countries that they are working with. But of course, there is the option of addressing very general questions, and then seeing whether to follow up individually with each institution on specific country contexts. Regarding the burden of analytics of current programmes financed by donors, given the Covid-19 situation and the need for prioritization, a suggested approach would be to remain flexible (for instance focusing on what can be delivered now, and postpone what can be done later). BMZ is also currently working with GIZ offices in partner countries to have a deeper analysis of the food system and the current situation in the countries where they are implementing the Global Food Security and Nutrition Programme. They are happy to share the results as soon as it is done.

USAID: Agree that there is a need for specific questions. Proposed two ways in which the group can go about drawing up the list of common questions: Either inquiring beforehand from these institutions on what they are working on, or the group drawing their list and approach the institutions with them. Also, USAID inquired on how best to prioritize the questions to incorporate countries' needs.

Norad: The quickest way is to reach out to these institutions to clarify what questions they are already working on, before coming up with a common set of questions to avoid duplication.

France: They have not tasked any specific organization to undertake any modelling project since the pandemic started. They are following a few data sources such as FAO, WFP, CFS, G20 (Agricultural market information system but mainly linked to the four main cereals), Sahel and West Africa Club



(SWAC-OECD), Food Crisis Prevention Network, EU (Global Report on Food Crisis) and Civil society including Oxfam

5. Role of the GDPRD:

The secretariat can offer support in the following areas:

- Provide support in communication and information-sharing (facilitating the conversation, providing support tools and mailing lists, and reaching out to the audience.)
- There is the possibility to use the website of the platform, and there is a landing page dedicated to Covid-19 ready to be used.
- Reach out to everybody through the platform to make that inventory, next discussion deep-dive country level, what we have, feed the discussion

6. Conclusion and AOB

There is a clear interest from various partners in carrying out a review of existing analytical work and promote coordinated efforts in carrying out new work, as it is apparent that everyone is struggling to get this information quickly in an operational way. The modeling that is done in IFPRI might be able to be translated to a quick response to the Covid-19 demand. We will share some of the challenges raised in this meeting during CGIAR Council meeting, with regards to information access. It is important to note that this initiative does not aim to be a coordinating mechanism proper, but a platform for information exchange. Next meeting will be in two weeks and will focus on country deep dives. We encourage the donors to reach out to let us know what issue should be discussed and included on the agenda.

Secretariat: Donors are focusing on different regions not only countries. It is a good idea to have as a first step a broad overview of which bilateral or multilateral action response is already ongoing and in which region. The secretariat will then collect this data and lay them on top of each other, to come up with some focus regions.

Canada: As the solution in this crisis goes beyond traditional actors, they are currently exploring how to use diplomacy tools to advocate and demarche some countries. A possible joint up response at the diplomacy advocacy level is being investigated. Extended an invitation to the donors to join this discussion.

David (Platform Chair): This conversation around the analytics needs to be continued even beyond the crisis and the Platform will continue to support this. In order to continue this conversation, we need Platform members to identify the topics they want to discuss. This is an important topic for the platform to be weighing on, as it is uniquely positioned to coordinate such discussions.