

Covid-19 Response Task Force Minutes

Food security and Covid – 19: Country deep dives: Who is doing country studies, how to use them and which networks can be used for coordination?

15 June 2020

Participants

1. Paul van de Logt – The Netherlands (Chair)
2. David Hegwood – USAID (and Donor Platform Co-Chair)
3. Conrad Rein- EU (and Donor Platform Co-Chair)
4. Maximo Torero Cullen - FAO
5. Benoit Thierry - IFAD
6. James Thurlow - IFPRI
7. Elwyn Grainger-Jones - CGIAR
8. Ekaterina Krivonos – CGIAR
9. Willem Wefers Bettink, IFAD
10. Astrid Mastenbroek – The Netherlands
11. Iris Krebber- DFID
12. Oriane Barthélemy - France (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs)

13. Jennifer Chow - USAID
14. Chris Hillbruner – USAID
15. Meredith McCormack - USAID
16. Anna Friedemann-Pfautsch - BMZ
17. Ammad Bahalim – Gates Foundation
18. Alan Rennison – Gates Foundation
19. Marco Platzer – AICS
20. Federica De Gaetano – AICS
21. Ueli Mauderli - SDC
22. Odd Arnesen – Norad
23. Madhur Gautum – World Bank
24. Teunis van Rheenen - IFPRI

Secretariat

1. Maurizio Navarra - IFAD
2. Joerg Lohmann - GIZ
3. Sylvia Otieno – GIZ

Main decisions:

- **Development Ministers’ meeting:** The Chair to countercheck whether the shared FAO document can be circulated widely to members of this Task Force. He will also check the results of the Development Ministers meeting to see whether it resulted to some guiding principles that can be brought on board during the next meeting.
- **Role of the secretariat:** To update links shared during this meeting on the website
- **Next meeting:** The Chair and Secretariat will initiate a conversation via email with the members when setting the agenda following up on the output from the Development Ministers’ meeting and will include coordination issues and scalable action.

1. Opening

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming all participants and recapped on previous COVID-19 response task force meetings. The primary goal of the meeting was an informal exchange on the availability of country studies, and their use in country networks that can help keep track of developments and possibly facilitate coordination. He then introduced the speakers for the next agenda item.

2. FAO- Accelerating Food System Transformation and Resilience in times of COVID-19: Country Case Experiences- Maximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist/Assistant Director-General

FAO took the floor to explain how they have approached the crisis and how they are undertaking country work. The main highlights of the presentation were as follows:

FAO has split the process of Covid-19 into three phases:

- Containment, which focused on lockdowns and related mobility and logistical problems the pandemic has created to agricultural supply chains.
- Recession, which focused on consequences currently being experienced particularly on food access and availability in the next planting season.
- Way forward, in terms of looking at the Health-Food-Development tri-ology. There is a need to consider health protocols in the food value chains and link them to opportunities to resolve extreme short-term problems and transform food systems.

FAO also noted that the 55 countries categorized under IPC/CH phase 3 on the food crisis map are likely to be extremely vulnerable to any potential shocks and for this they are being tracked very closely. He also mentioned additional countries/regions, which are also vulnerable, based on a study focusing on channels of transmission, ranking such channels by severity. In terms of country level transmission, FAO is aiming to have an indicator on how to measure new hot spots of food insecurity, by trying to promote and implement the Food Insecurity Experience Scale to identify the new hotspots of food insecurity and areas to target in terms of policy. Funding has already been secured to undertake three rounds of survey in a few emergency countries.

FAO also highlighted that the next major issue will be how to meet immediate needs of vulnerable populations in terms of:

- **Emergency food assistance, nutrition intervention and safety nets enhanced and made more accessible.** FAO has been working intensely on that and especially on how to link smallholder production to mechanisms of safety nets. FAO is currently undertaking country-by-country analysis to identify opportunities, for example on ways of transferring surplus to food banks and other mechanisms, such as NGOs, to avoid food loss and waste. FAO then presented few country examples (Ethiopia, Haiti, Somalia, Sudan and Tanzania) and highlighted target population, current portfolio, pre-COVID drivers of high levels of acute food insecurity, and context-specific interventions currently being implemented.
- **Urgent increases in food availability from smallholder farmer food production** – There is a need for a tool to improve proper storage of harvested produce to minimize food losses and waste and boost productivity and resilience. Here, FAO presented various approaches being implemented in member countries, including COVID-19 Rapid Assessment in Tanzania, and Green corridor of storage units in Ghana and Kenya.
- **Issues on trade and tax policies** – Focus is on country-by-country transmission mechanisms, which aims to profile countries that are more at risk and identify opportunities to create



additional demand through interregional trade, to better cope with the recession, for instance by building the Pan Africa Food Safety Agency.

Co-chair stated that FAO has done several studies and work that seem to evolve in to a circle- we had a problem, now there is a bigger problem and we need to understand what should be done differently - and inquired whether the current assessment also follows the same circle. Additionally, inquired about specific advice FAO would give to donors with regards to in-country interventions on what to do/not to do, building on FAO's experience.

FAO responded that the whole process is a learning by doing, which endeavors to bring in best practices from various countries. FAO stressed the importance of considering unique aspects of this crisis when developing interventions, and the need to maximize the use of digital mechanisms. FAO also emphasized the need to be careful with definitions, to avoid mistakes, and insisted on the importance of fine tuning and coordinating the donor community to avoid duplication especially given constrained resources during this crisis.

SDC inquired about the fields in which FAO has observed most duplications among donors.

FAO gave an example of FAPDA, a policy database that collects policy intervention across countries. FAO further added that the most important thing in this historical phase is understand where the hotspots are and target interventions towards these.

3. IFAD: Corona response, experiences from the West Africa Hub in Dakar - Benoît Thierry, Head of West Africa Hub and Senegal Country Director

IFAD took the floor to share some of the COVID-19 responses and experiences from the West Africa and Sahel Hub in Dakar, with a focus on technical and coordination aspects. The main points highlighted were as follows:

There have been several types of reactions since the beginning of the crisis, including reaching out to IFAD member states, to offer support and facilitate requests from governments. IFAD noted that during the first weeks, members states prioritized activities along three timeframes:

- Short-term: Participating in health and hygiene efforts in rural areas
- Medium-term: Some countries - particularly Ghana and Senegal - have repurposed and restructured many of IFAD-funded projects to respond to the crisis and prepare for the next shock, for instance by preparing for the next rainy season. This included preparing agricultural inputs such as seeds and facilitating how to make them accessible to farmers
- Long-term: Focusing more on the market side, now and in the future.

Technical solutions being implemented by IFAD include restructuring of their projects to respond to current shocks, and the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF). IFAD explained that the RPSF (currently budgeted by IFAD at US\$40 million, with a target of 200 million to be reached through member states' contributions) will be implemented in more than 50 countries.

The coordination aspect involves working substantially with the bodies established within the countries. So far, each country in West and Central Africa has set up a COVID-19 Taskforce with lead Ministers. IFAD noted that they have a strong coordination with farmers' organizations, and this has helped in bringing them in the debate and coordinating with the government. Many such organizations have also established their anti-COVID measures with their members.

In the future IFAD is looking at how to turn this calamity into an opportunity and highlighted the importance of multiplying agricultural production to cater for the projected demographic increase. He also emphasized the need for more digital tools (for example the weconnectfarmers.com that is a



repository of all existing digital solutions) to increase access to smallholders in rural areas. In collaboration with Rome-based agencies and G-5 Sahel and Ecowas, IFAD has also started a program which is aimed at scaling up existing activities in all transboundary areas of Sahel, both for agriculture and agro-pastoralist

Co-chair inquired about the suitability and opportunity for digital tools, especially since the markets have been disturbed following the crisis, and how this will progress.

IFAD: Digital tools are spreading very fast and they are helping with the provision of services, such as extension services to smallholders which is necessary. Most areas now have 3G network coverage. IFAD is looking into supporting many startups coming up in East Africa and West Africa on these aspects. The challenge remains on how to ensure that the startups continue and are sustainable, and this requires support from both donors and governments. IFAD also stressed the need and value of utilizing both the local startups and digital tools, and the more advanced Silicone Valley digital tools which aim to promote interaction with farmers.

4. IFPRI – James Thurlow – Ongoing and Planned COVID-19 country studies and policy engagement

IFPRI took the floor to share their ongoing and planned COVID-19 country studies and policy engagement. The main points highlighted were as follows:

It is crucial to understand the impacts COVID-19 will have on agricultural production and the need of preventing this crisis from evolving from a food access problem into a food availability one. There is a lot of work going on across all the centres and research programmes and a full range of work done so far is available on their website (see the link on their introductory slide). IFPRI noted that their quick response in terms of analytics can be attributed to the existence of country programmes and large staff already working with governments and secondly, the existence of tools that were repurposed to meet the challenges of this crisis. The existing studies are constantly being reassessed as new information becomes available and as the governments try to test out new policy recommendations.

IFPRI's work is focused around two main stages of analysis:

- Evaluating immediate impacts and recovery pathways – Economic costs of social distancing and global market disruptions in 2020. IFPRI also highlighted few countries that they are currently working in and preliminary findings in these countries so far; and stated that they are hoping to expand the list of countries. He also elaborated on the methods they are currently using to measure impacts and highlighted key challenges in terms of data analysis and designing policy interventions.
- Reassessing policy and public investment priorities – In this stage, IFPRI is actively working with the Gates Foundation and USAID to model policy responses to determine the most cost-effective way to drive the recovery process in the short-term, while maintaining the movement towards longer-term goals. They are also working to broaden their analysis to incorporate other areas, such as epidemiological studies and are engaging new partners.

IFPRI stressed the need for policy tracking in a consistent and coherent way across all impact channels. The key need is to start analyzing policy interventions across countries, at the sub-regional and regional levels, and across food systems to consolidate lessons learnt and share them with governments, so that they can also consider them alongside other more traditional responses.

BMZ inquired how IFPRI is dealing with understanding the impact of COVID-19 in relation to the number of people who are already considered chronically food insecure.

IFPRI stated that there is currently an uncertainty on how COVID-19 will affect the next cropping and harvesting season, and thus it is difficult to predict the expected impact to food systems and food



availability. He also added that it is difficult to project the probable permanent impacts as there is currently no information on how food availability will be affected and stressed on the need of incorporating such information.

FAO added they are tracking the purchase of inputs in order to predict how the planting season will happen. Also stated that there is likely to be significant losses for high value commodities because of reduced markets. There is uncertainty on the extent of planting by smallholders in the next season, given that they are facing significant constraints. This is likely to cause significant problems unless the constraints are addressed.

Chair expressed gratitude to the speakers for their time and insightful presentations. The links provided will be updated on the GDPRD website landing site on COVID-19.

5. Tour de table

Chair thanked BMGF and USAID for supporting part of the work presented by IFPRI and noted that the studies are valuable for getting a grip of the current situation. He also stressed on the need for information sharing and posed a question on how best to follow up on the role of the Platform in taking this debate forward.

Secretariat reiterated their engagement and full availability to provide support to this task force in terms of logistics, organization, communication, and advocacy. There is an opportunity and possibility of linking the COVID-19 debate to a much broader context, for instance the SDG2 Roadmap as well as other GDPRD Thematic Working Groups and build this narrative within the coming Strategic Plan 2021-2025. There are currently ongoing discussions with the Chairs and Senior Consultant on the Strategic Plan Development process, and the Board will be updated on the progress made soon. Secretariat also added that the COVID-19 debate and issues raised around it - for instance the importance of minimizing duplication - have a huge potential and there is a need to define the next steps, and how to translate the commitments and meetings into tangible and pragmatic action.

USAID mentioned that a Development Ministers meeting on food security has recently taken place. USAID further stressed the need for a deeper conversation on coordination to figure out the priority areas that donors could focus their efforts on as individual organizations, and a more cohesive conversation on how to best operate so that donors are effective and focus on right areas with minimal duplication.

DFID stated that for the Development Ministers meeting, their secretary of State intended to put food security on the agenda, particularly on the need for better coordination. DFID to countercheck within their organization the outputs of this meeting.

USAID noted that from the Development Ministers meeting, the need for a technical group to carry forward the discussion and better coordination and coherence was highlighted. Also mentioned a paper prepared by FAO as a background to this meeting and inquired whether it can be shared with other members of the Task Force. Emphasized that this paper could provide a good foundation for consequent meetings and noted that this group creates an opportunity for coordination between donors on various strategies.

Chair questioned how to put the coordination discussion on the agenda for consequent meetings: whether to discuss it in the context of scalable action or discuss it as a separate agenda item before the Scalable action discussion. He further noted that the main challenge of coordination is the difficulty in getting an agreement on how to shape it, as it is often resource intensive or takes some other mechanism that less people are obliged inclined to follow.



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USAID stated that putting the conversation on coordination in the context of scalable actions provides a way of keeping it focused and productive. Globally, there is generally an agreement of issues that need to be addressed. There is a need for a more thorough discussion on such issues in order to build consensus around them. USAID also noted that there are important points highlighted by FAO, IFAD, and IFPRI that this Task force could dive deeper into to ensure that donors have a better understanding of what is going on and how to move forward together

France fronted Elise Sabourin from GIZ who is currently coordinating the agriculture special group of Sahel Alliance as a potential speaker for the next COVID-19 Task Force conversation on the need for coordination.

BGMF stressed the need for targeted and focused coordination between donors. BGMF further highlighted the need of first defining scalable actions in order to guide conversations around donor coordination and added that this will be a complex task.

Chair stated that the Netherlands has received the mentioned FAO backgrounded paper that was prepared for the Development Ministers meeting and will countercheck to see whether it can be shared with other members of this task force. He also noted that he will check the results of the Development Ministers meeting to see whether it resulted to some guiding principles that can be brought on board during the next meeting. Consequently, the Chair and Secretariat will initiate a conversation via email with the members when setting the agenda following up on the output from the Development Ministers meeting and will include coordination issues and scalable action.