

COVID-19 impact on global food security and the role of international community

Disruptions in global value chains and resulting high food prices have different effects on different categories of the population in developing countries. Low-income households who spend a large percentage of their income on food will have to cut other costs, such as education. This in turn will impact the human capital development and level of skills in the economy. In the long-term, it could result in higher unemployment and increased pressure on government's social programs. On the other hand, small-scale food producers can benefit if they can increase their output by investing part of their income or receiving financial support from the government or banks. In addition, these investments could lead to job creation and increased consumer spending that will have a positive impact on the economy.

Food security has four dimensions, as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – food availability, food access, utilization of food, which refers to non-food inputs such as sanitation and clean water necessary to prepare food, and food stability which means having access to adequate food at all times. While food products at high prices might be available, individuals who do not have sufficient income to access high-priced food products will not consume foods of appropriate quality and in the necessary quantities. This results in hunger and malnutrition. Children are particularly affected. In 2019, 21.3% (144 million) of children under 5 years of age were stunted and 6.9% (47 million) wasted (FAO, 2020). Food insecurity has been a growing concern, due to the continued increase, even before COVID-19, in the number of individuals experiencing hunger and individuals who do not have regular access to food.

To increase food security, the international community can support countries in developing a rural infrastructure – energy, irrigation, transport, telecommunication, assist in improving current farming methods to increase productivity, and facilitate farming technology and knowledge transfer.

In addition, aid directed to education and health will ensure that, while addressing food insecurity, countries can develop the human capital required for both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - SDG 1 No Poverty and SDG 2 No Hunger, as well as sustainable economic growth.

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