



THE REALITY OF COVID-19 BURDEN IN HORN AND EASTERN AFRICA



THE REALITY OF COVID-19 BURDEN IN HORN AND EASTERN AFRICA

PRODUCED BY GEORGE OUMA AND MICHELLE BROWN, JUNE 2020
ADVOCACY DEPARTMENT ACTION AGAINST HUNGER
FOR ENQUIRIES, CONTACT: gouma@actionagainsthunger.org

THE IMPACT ON FOOD SECURITY

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact on already fragile livelihoods and unstable economies in the Horn and East Africa. Some of these impacts may include reduced agricultural productivity, weak supply chains, increased cross border trade tensions, limited employment prospects and rising political and regulatory uncertainty. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, 33.1 million people in the eastern and central Africa region were severely food insecure (IPC phase 3 or worse) and required food assistance. Of these, 16.95 million are from four of the eight IGAD member countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan). In recent months, flooding and displacement have pushed thousands into food insecurity. In addition, a predicted second generation of desert locust infestation poses a large-scale threat to food security in the greater Horn of Africa. An already bleak food security picture will be compounded as the the COVID-19 pandemic could destroy livelihoods, disrupt supply chains, strain national budgets, and restrict trade. The UN is predicting that the number of severely insecure in the world could double in the next year.

Agriculture remains one of the largest contributors of GDP in the Greater Horn of Africa, a region characterized by high poverty levels, weak health systems, crowded urban areas, and high levels of diseases including malnutrition, malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS¹. Furthermore, Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan are also affected by armed conflict.

In early March 2020, the region recorded its first detection of COVID-19 cases, and since then the pandemic has grown considerably in the region, now reaching 18,061 cases and 389 deaths as of 29th June. The spread is still moderately low considering that the total global cases have now reached about 10.5 million with around 500,000 deaths.²

Restrictions on movement within and across countries is disrupting regional and national food supply chains and affecting the availability of food as well as labor markets and supplies of critical agriculture inputs. This will pose a challenge for food production and could jeopardize food security for all people, especially the poor and marginalized. Access to food will be increasingly difficult for the most vulnerable. A global recession would exacerbate the situation, as it would limit job opportunities, disrupt the flow of remittances and drive food prices upward as food production slows.

¹ Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2020), COVID-19 risk in Africa

² <https://covid19.who.int/region/afro/country>



Africa's projected GDP growth of 3.2 percent for 2020 is now expected to recess to -0.8 percent.

Kenya's GDP growth averaged 5.4 percent in 2019, and had been projected to grow at about 5.7 percent in 2020. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the GDP growth is expected to decline to 1.0 percent.

Ethiopia is Africa's second-most populous country with more than 110 million people. The country's real GDP growth in 2019 was 9.0 percent and was forecasted to be 6.2 percent for 2020 pre-COVID-19. This forecast has now been revised downwards to 3.2 percent in 2020.

Tanzania's GDP was initially estimated to increase by 5.3 percent in 2020, down from 6.3 percent in 2019. However, following the COVID-19 pandemic, Tanzania's GDP growth is expected to decline to 2 percent in 2020.

Uganda's GDP grew on average 5.9 percent in 2019, and has been projected to grow by about 5.3 percent in 2020. However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, GDP growth is expected to decline to 3.5 percent.

Previously, high-growth economies in East and West Africa such as Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania are expected to see considerably slower GDP expansion in 2020 but still with positive growth rates primarily because these countries are less or not resource-intensive and as such more resilient.

THE IMPACT ON LIVELIHOODS

The social distancing and lockdown measures that governments have put in place to save lives and suppress the transmission of the virus have resulted in a significant reduction of economic activity across all major economies, including the Greater Horn of Africa Region³. At the household level, struggling families are increasingly seeing breadwinners lose their jobs or are selling productive assets in order to survive. Restrictions on trade have led to reduced imports and price hikes including high transport costs, increasing prices for agricultural inputs, increases in food prices, and business closures. Restrictions on movement have led to job losses and a decline in household incomes. The economic impacts of COVID-19 are expected to be severe, far reaching and long.

Despite the various measures in place, projections of current trends in the Greater Horn of Africa Region indicate that the virus is likely to spread further, impacting the economy, livelihoods, and food and nutrition security. Many households are expected to face difficulty engaging in levels of agricultural activities that lead to self-sufficiency due to low incomes and lack of access to agricultural inputs. Many farmers in the region have also experienced conflict and flooding. COVID-19 could lead to further income losses and market constraints.

Despite the difficulties facing farmers, government support to agricultural production is expected to decline due to falling revenues. Quarantine measures could further limit farmers' access to their land and limit their access to essential agricultural inputs. As a result, crop production is likely to be below average, leading to more severe food insecurity and malnutrition in the medium to long term.

COVID-19 restrictions are also negatively impacting households' livelihoods in urban areas, as federal and state governments implement lockdown measures and movement restrictions, which limit access to employment. These measures have also decreased both formal and informal trade. The combined loss of household income, and in some cases price increases, has led to an increase in the population-facing crisis (IPC Phase 3)⁴. Due to movement restrictions and mandatory business closures, household income from casual labor and petty trade have declined to be below normal, especially in urban areas within the region Nairobi, Juba, Kampala and Addis Ababa. Millions will lose incomes, fail to access resources needed for day-to-day well-being, and will require new skills/training or new ways of supporting their livelihoods.

Cross-border trade is already adversely impacted in the Horn and East Africa region. This is a particular concern as the majority of the countries are cereal deficit countries despite cereal representing key commodities for local diets. Panic buying spiked in most countries with mobility restrictions and anticipated lockdowns as governments tightened measures to contain the spread of the virus. School feeding programs, a lifeline for many poor students, have been suspended due to school closures. Together with high food prices and lack of employment, household purchasing power is expected to decline through the next few months. Rising food and nutrition insecurity may force families to adopt negative coping mechanisms and lead to increased protection concerns.

3 IMF, World Bank, African Union

4 Famine Early Warning Systems Network April 2020



THE QUEST FOR SAFER FOODS: COVID-19 AND DAIRY VALUE CHAINS IN ETHIOPIA

The share of households consuming dairy products in Addis Ababa has dropped by 11 percentage points since the COVID-19 crisis, seemingly linked to perceived risks of consuming dairy products. All income groups declined their consumption, except for the richest quintile where the share of consuming households changed little.

More than half of the consumers in Addis Ababa reported to avoid the consumption of animal-source foods due to the COVID-19 risk. There is, however, strong heterogeneity in the type of dairy products that are affected. We find a significant drop in the demand for raw milk, a steady, or even higher, consumption of pasteurized milk, and an increase in purchases of powdered milk, as the latter two are considered safer by consumers.

This change in consumer preference is passed down through the dairy value chain with those distributors, collectors, and rural farmers involved in the raw milk value chain severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Some dairy households further indicated losses, and some indicated increasing their own consumption.

ACCESS TO FOOD

The region is already experiencing supply chain difficulties. Restrictions on the movement of cargo are also impacting food and fuel availability in importing countries. In addition, restrictions on the movements of people and the reduction in productivity in the manufacturing sector have led to a reduction in the availability of food and agricultural products, and have also interrupted several value chains⁵. In Ethiopia, the dairy and vegetable value chains have been severely affected⁶. Producer prices for vegetables are on the decline. Fewer traders are traveling to rural areas because of the travel ban, social distancing policies, and fear of infection. Combined with reduced urban demand and oversupply, producer prices are rapidly declining. For example, a quintal (100 kg) of heads of cabbage that sold for about 300 birr (\$9) about two weeks earlier, sold for only 100 birr (\$3) at the end of March. Similarly, onions that sold for 15-17 birr (\$0.50) per kg about two weeks earlier were selling for about 9-10 birr (\$0.30) per kg at the end of March, a 40 percent decline. If restrictions on movement persist, food stocks will decline, and prices will increase.

The food and agriculture sector could get hurt by shortages of labor, which will negatively impact production and food processing, especially of labor-intensive agricultural production like fruits, vegetable and meat: transport interruptions and quarantine measures limiting farmers' access to input and output markets; and an increase in food loss and waste resulting from food supply chain disruptions.

COVID-19 containment measures such as closure of schools and bans on large public gatherings have curtailed the ability to reach some of the most vulnerable through traditional distribution means. As COVID becomes more widespread, more stringent measures may have to be put in place, resulting in the temporary suspension of assistance. According to a WFP analysis of the potential impact of COVID-19 on food assistance delivery and FEWS NET's conversations with WFP staff, WFP anticipates that overall operational capacity to procure or distribute food assistance will somewhat decline this period, while more time will need to be spent in planning and beneficiary management to implement two-month distributions and ensure social distancing at distribution points to minimize the risk of transmission.

⁵ http://essp.ifpri.info/files/2020/05/dairy_blog_May_updated.pdf

⁶ <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/impacts-covid-19-crisis-vegetable-value-chains-ethiopia>

IMPACT OF COVID ON LOCUST CONTROL

The desert locust situation remains critical and a threat to food security and livelihoods, particularly in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia where hopper bands are already beginning to form immature swarms. The COVID-19 pandemic will also exacerbate the impacts of conflict and climate change on food security and could undermine national responses to the desert locust infestation. The Desert Locust upsurge continues to remain alarming, particularly in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia especially if the COVID-19 pandemic undermines the locust prevention efforts of national governments. However, the prevention measure from FAO and government is working with long rain or Gu harvest likely to be near normal or 10 percent below. As a result, it is critical that locust surveillance and control operations, as well as livelihood and food security responses continue, even with the movement restrictions in place to prevent the spread of the virus. Food security impacts due to crop and pasture losses from the desert locusts remain most likely in areas where control measures are limited. Areas of highest concern include conflict-affected areas in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia and there is rising concern for damage to crops in southeastern South Sudan.

Ultimately the COVID-19 pandemic effect will exacerbate existing food crises in the East Africa region and drive worsening food security and nutritional outcomes. Through FAO, donors pledged or provided \$153 million to help governments purchase pesticides, helicopters and other essential materials needed to fight the second locust outbreak, but supplies purchased by the agency did not start to arrive until mid-March when a second generation of locusts was beginning to hatch. The locust infestation, along with COVID-19, flooding, and conflict, could wreak havoc on the region's food supply.

PROJECTED IMPACT TO FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES IN THE COMING MONTHS

There is concern that the COVID-19 pandemic could turn into a hunger pandemic in the coming months. The COVID-19 pandemic will continue, and an increasing number of cases and deaths across the region is likely as the anticipated peak of the disease is expected to be towards the end of 2020. National government-implemented control measures are likely to vary across the region. The strict and widespread control measures are unsustainable in the long term. As control measures change, access to income among urban poor households will also fluctuate but overall, many will continue to face a notable decline in incomes. Rural households will likely engage in small scale farming and movement of livestock with some (but not large-scale) disrupted. The impact of the pandemic amidst other shocks will likely cause significant deterioration and erosion of livelihoods and productive assets, food security and nutrition of populations in this already fragile region. The closure of rural food and livestock markets will affect the incomes of rural livelihoods. At the same time, closures of restaurants and hotels will continue to reduce the demand for fresh produce, meat and fish, reducing incomes of farmers, livestock keepers and suppliers.

CALL TO ACTION TO GOVERNMENTS, DONORS, THE UN SYSTEM AND KEY ACTORS

ENSURE HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

- National governments should consider humanitarian programming as essential, thus exempting humanitarian personnel and supplies from movement restrictions and enabling them to assist populations in need.

STRENGTHEN SOCIAL PROTECTION SERVICES

- Link the COVID-19 response to the locust response through integrating messaging pathways, which have been established for both the locusts and COVID-19 response.
- Initiate and scale up safety net systems to reduce the impact of the outbreak on the most vulnerable segments of society. These groups of people may have suffered disproportionately from prolonged reductions in income, increased health costs, and limited access to food. Measures may include paying for health care, providing paid sick leave, and economic support, such as recurring multi-purpose cash transfers.
- Social protection mechanisms for the poorest and most vulnerable people need to be strengthened. These mechanisms should provide essential assistance in the short term and support livelihoods in the long term.

SUSTAIN THE SUPPLY CHAIN SYSTEM

- Scale up support for food processing, transport, and local food markets, and ensure trade corridors remain open to ensure the continuous functioning of the food supply chain and agri-food systems.
- Workers in the Food and Agriculture sector (agricultural production, food processing, distribution, retail and food service) are named as essential workers.

GOVERNMENT TO EXPAND SPACE FOR MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION TO ENHANCE COORDINATION IN COVID-19 RESPONSE

- Continued coordinated planning and response involving governments, UN and NGOs to effectively address food security gaps especially among populations categorized in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3+).
- Governments and partners continue supporting the fight against the ongoing desert locust invasion, taking necessary precautions and guidelines provided by public health departments to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Assessments to ascertain impact and contingency planning to support impacted livelihoods should continue.
- Strengthen mechanisms that mitigate the impact of COVID-19 from disrupting food supply chains and associated livelihoods (i.e. disruption to farming operations, enable access to production inputs, critical emergency veterinary drugs as well as produce markets by farming households).

FOR FOOD.
AGAINST HUNGER
AND MALNUTRITION.

FOR CLEAN WATER.
AGAINST KILLER DISEASES.

**FOR CHILDREN THAT GROW
UP STRONG.**
AGAINST LIVES CUT SHORT.

**FOR CROPS THIS YEAR,
AND NEXT.**
AGAINST DROUGHT
AND DISASTER.

FOR CHANGING MINDS.
AGAINST IGNORANCE AND
INDIFFERENCE.

**FOR FREEDOM FROM HUNGER.
FOR EVERYONE. FOR GOOD.**

FOR ACTION.
AGAINST HUNGER.

