

We must act now to avert an imminent food crisis in Africa

By [Maria Helena Semedo](#)

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The Covid-19 pandemic has reached Africa at a time when the continent is already grappling with multiple crises. Undeniably, Africa's recovery from this pandemic will be a formidable task that requires pragmatic multi-sectoral and synergised actions.



Maria Helena Semedo, deputy director-general, UNFAO

A food crisis was looming in Africa even before the emergence of Covid-19. Over 256 million Africans, or 20% of the population are undernourished. Among these, about 73 million are severely food insecure, and Africa has five of the ten countries classified as the world's most food insecure nations.

Nutrition outcomes are also disheartening: Africa is home to 59 million stunted children and the continent is not on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals' target of reducing by 40% the number of stunted children by 2030.

In the recent past, conflicts left 33 million people in ten countries in Africa in need of urgent humanitarian assistance and displaced many millions of people, further jeopardising their food security.

Another 23 million are in need of assistance due to climate shocks such as droughts, floods and landslides. Weather conditions are also known for catalysing the breeding of destructive pests, such as the Desert Locust and Fall Armyworm.



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9 Jun 2020



Covid-19 worsening food security

Covid-19 is the latest addition to this calamity, worsening the already-dire food security situation, disproportionately affecting already vulnerable women and girls.

Disruptions to food value chains will likely result in higher food prices and reduced availability of, and access to, food.

Smallholder farmers, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists will be the hardest hit, as they have limited coping capacities against Covid-19, while facing the multiple shocks of Desert Locusts, floods and severe droughts.

The immediate and long-term economic consequences of the pandemic will likely push millions more people into food insecurity and malnutrition. In any scenario, the most affected will be the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the population.

What needs to be done?

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted inequalities and vulnerabilities in food systems, and business cannot continue as usual. Together we have an opportunity to re-orient and transform food systems to be more resilient and sustainable.

We must start now to plan for a better recovery which can help to steer Africa onto a safer, healthier, more sustainable and inclusive path. Poorly coordinated policies risk locking in or worsening already unsustainable inequalities, reversing hard-won gains towards poverty reduction and ending hunger.

Improved coherence across sectors such as agriculture, trade, disaster risk management and social protection is critical to 'building back better'.

No country or single organisation can overcome the spread of Covid-19 and the multiple crises alone. Collaborative and multi-sectoral actions are urgently required to avert an imminent food crisis in Africa, as we pave the way for recovery and rebuilding.



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28 May 2020



Supporting access to food, nutrition

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) welcomes African Union member states' recent commitment to support access to food and nutrition for Africa's most vulnerable; provide Africans with social safety nets; minimise disruptions to the safe movement and transport of essential people, and to the transport and marketing of goods and services; and keep borders open on the continent for food and agriculture trade. FAO is working with the African Union and other stakeholders to support countries to implement these commitments.

FAO is also supporting members to continue their social protection schemes – in particular cash transfers, school feeding and public works programmes. These programmes are effective when well designed and well-implemented. They reduce

poverty and food insecurity as well as strengthening household resilience, building human capital and stimulating farm and non-farm activities.

In addition, FAO encourages countries to enforce health sector policies that protect smallholder farmers against health hazards and catastrophic healthcare costs.

Promoting intra-regional trade and local markets, FAO is also actively working on how food systems should transform to be able to cope with crises such as Covid-19 but also to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Overcoming existing crises and building resilience are the ways to put Africa back on track towards sustainable development.

Let us act now, quickly and boldly, before multiple crises put millions more people at risk of hunger and malnutrition and make sustainable development further out of reach.

Africa will get through these crises, but only if we act together, in solidarity.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Helena Semedo, deputy director-general, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)

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