

Build diverse food systems for post-COVID-19 world

April 28 2020, by Trevor Nicholls, Sayed Azam-Ali, Ismahane Elouafi, David Molden, Segenet Kelemu, Albin Hubscher, Marco Wopereis



Women selling produce at a market in Ganmo, between Esia and Ilorin, Kwara state Nigeria. The spread of COVID-19 is threatening food security for increasing numbers of people around the world. Credit: [Carsten ten Brink \(CC BY-NC-ND 2.0\)](#)

The world's 7.6 billion residents are facing an unmitigated and unprecedented fight against a global public health emergency.

The spread of COVID-19 across the globe has led to never-before-experienced lockdown situations—which in turn are having a significant impact across agricultural systems—threatening [food security](#) for increasing numbers of people around the world.

At the same time, the stark reality is that around half a billion smallholder farmers, who [help produce](#) almost 80 percent of the [food](#) consumed in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are not immune to the impacts of this crisis. They are experiencing significant disruptions of the vital food supply chains in which they are essential participants as producers and consumers.

We must not forget those vulnerable communities living in marginal environments in these regions. For instance, the recently launched Hindu-Kush Himalaya Assessment points to the fact that around one-third of the population in the region is food insecure, and half of the population is suffering from malnutrition with severe impacts on children and women.

Those countries less able to cope with the pandemic are yet to feel the full impact of the crisis on their citizens and the smallholder farmers who help feed them and the wider world.

Local, national and global food supply chains will falter if farmers cannot access inputs or supplies necessary for efficient production, get into their fields to sow their crops, fertilize appropriately, manage pest and weed problems, harvest perishable products such as fruits and vegetables, or participate in markets because of lockdowns.

Now more than ever, the Association of International Research and Development Centers for Agriculture (AIRCA) stands strong in hope and unity for global food and nutrition security.

It is encouraging that many governments are already reaching out to those most at risk of poverty and food insecurity, and to stimulate the recovery of rural economies, particularly agriculture. However, this presumes that agriculture is ready to respond.

Crops that can be grown in a short amount of time, such as quinoa, millet, sorghum, Salicornia and leafy traditional vegetables can give hope to [smallholder farmers](#) and rural communities struggling to contend with food and nutrition security amid the crisis. There may be many more [family members](#) to support as a result of the exodus from the big cities. Home gardening of vegetables and fruit, or enterprises around bee-keeping could be important additions to food supply and income for these families.

Our existing programs to stimulate local enterprise and increase empowerment are now doubly important for the poor and the disadvantaged in food systems, including market vendors, small-scale processors, grocery workers, and the truck drivers who deliver the goods.

The crisis underlines three important points: the importance of science and innovation; the vulnerability of billions of people at the bottom of the pyramid; and the need for more diversified, nutritious, and resilient food systems.

These shape our thinking about what the 'new normal' will look like when the current pandemic is over—as it surely will be.

AIRCA advocates a stronger interdisciplinary approach to research through the adoption of the "One Health' concept and integration of the '4-H': Plant Health, Animal Health, Human Health and Environmental Health.

The increasing impacts of climate change, for instance, are being felt

through greater incidences of zoonoses and transboundary animal diseases, as well as invasive pests such as the desert locust, the fall armyworm, *Tuta absoluta* and others. This points to the need for more urgent coordinated holistic responses across science disciplines.

AIRCA and its members pledge to combine our resources to ease the burden of this crisis on smallholders and food security systems now, and to build a more resilient and responsive food system in the 'new normal' to come.

Provided by SciDev.Net

Citation: Build diverse food systems for post-COVID-19 world (2020, April 28) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-04-diverse-food-post-covid-world.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.