



THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS EXACERBATING HUNGER WORLDWIDE

Drawing Lessons from the crisis and initiating change

One year on from the start of the coronavirus pandemic, many of the fears about the increase in hunger and poverty have been confirmed. Analyses by international institutions including the United Nations and the World Bank show just how devastating the pandemic has been on the global sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda, in particular those focused on ending hunger and poverty. The crisis has set development efforts back by years, if not decades.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) currently puts the number of people at risk of starvation at more than 270 million. This is double the pre-pandemic figure. The COVID crisis has greatly exacerbated the situation for those already suffering from poverty, armed conflict and the climate crisis.¹ The World Bank predicts that by the end of this year, the pandemic will cause 111 to 149 million people worldwide to fall into extreme poverty.² Even before the pandemic, the number of people suffering from chronic hunger had been on

the rise again. Far from "Zero Hunger", the number is now predicted to come close to one billion. The pandemic has prompted the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to adjust its estimates, and it now expects there to be between 860 and 909 million people suffering from hunger by 2030.³

A survey conducted in 25 partner countries confirms global figure

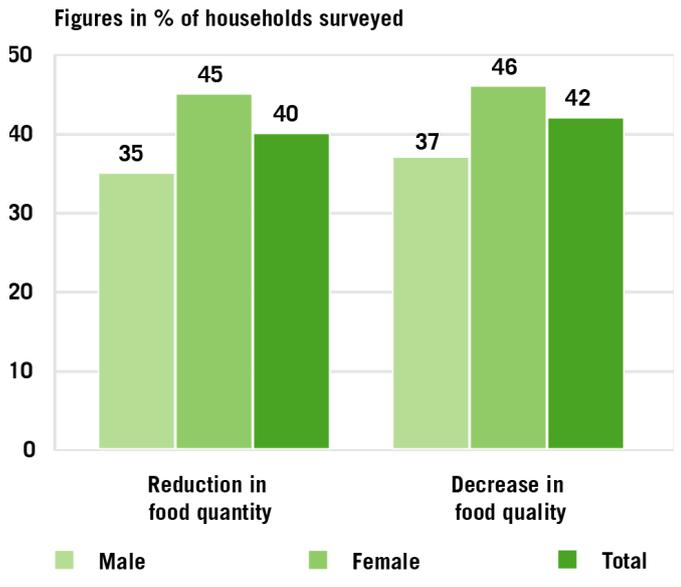
A survey conducted by Welthungerhilfe together with seven other European development and emergency aid organizations within the Alliance2015 network confirms these global trends and sheds light on the links between the coronavirus pandemic, poverty and hunger. Surveys conducted involving nearly 16,200 households in 25 countries between October and November 2020 showed that 42 percent of households had less to eat, while 44 percent reported a decline in the quality and diversity of their diets.

¹ World Food Programme: "[Global Update on COVID-19: November 2020](#)"

² World Bank: "[2020 Year in Review: The impact of COVID-19 in 12 charts](#)"

³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): "[The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World](#)", 2020

Decrease in the quantity and quality of food consumed in the households surveyed



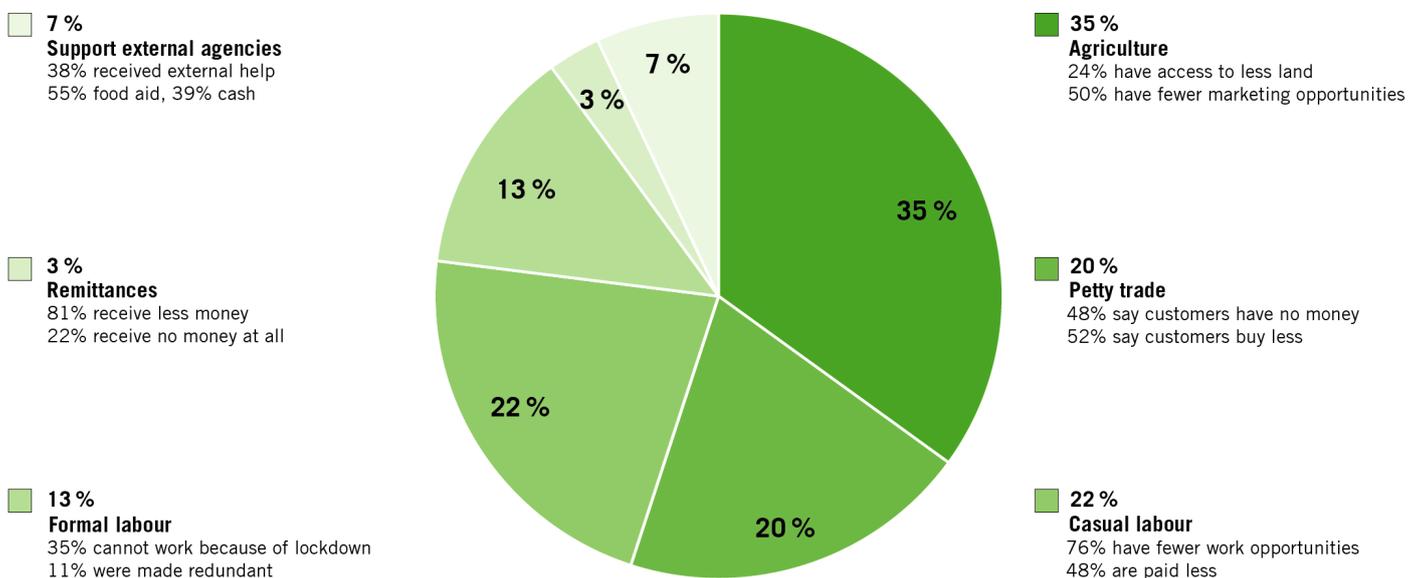
Nine countries are particularly affected, six of which are located in Sub-Saharan Africa: Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Kenya, Burundi, Liberia and Madagascar. In DRC and Malawi, more than 80 percent of those households surveyed have less to eat than they did before the pandemic. Hunger has risen sharply elsewhere, too, including in Ecuador, Afghanistan and Haiti. These figures show that COVID-19 is exacerbating existing levels of hunger and hitting the world's already poorest regions hardest.

This is primarily due to incomes having fallen drastically: ninety percent of those households surveyed report a reduction in income, while more than 75 percent fear that their incomes will continue to be negatively affected in future. This fall in income has been most keenly felt by people working in the informal sector in peri-urban areas.

Farmers are another group that has been hit hard by the effects of the pandemic, with 72 percent having experienced a loss of sales and just under half reporting that they were unable to sell their produce due to the lockdown. Other reasons for reduced incomes include delayed planting and harvesting (approximately fifty percent), reduced acreage and less seed and fertilizer (around one quarter). Overall, 75 percent of all respondents report that remittances through relatives abroad have either decreased or dried up completely. Two thirds of respondents in all sectors have been compelled to take on debt to cushion the impact of the pandemic.

A study published by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in February 2021 concludes that globally there was no shortage of food, and that the global food system was resilient enough to absorb the shocks caused by the pandemic, in part due to global trade flows. Yet hunger is on the rise. What is the explanation for this apparent contradiction?

Effects on income



In its definition of sustainable food security, the FAO distinguishes between "availability" and "access". Sufficient food was generally available during the pandemic; it was access that was limited, especially for the poorer urban population and people living in rural areas.

This lack of access is due to the consequences of the pandemic, namely restrictions on movement (as a result of lockdown measures), loss of work in the informal and formal sectors leading to a loss of income, and a general economic downturn. For example, street vendors were no longer permitted to sell their goods, migrants working as cleaners were sent home, and people in the textile industry were laid off.

Others, meanwhile, could leverage the pandemic to their benefit: grocery stores and super-markets were able to remain open and even expand their services online. They made billions in additional profit. IFPRI believes the negative social consequences of

the pandemic could potentially be redressed by redistributing these profits or using them to cover the costs incurred as a result of the pandemic.⁴

The negative effects on hunger and poverty were foreseeable

As early as April 2020, when the first "rescue plans" were being put together in the world's richer nations, Welthungerhilfe warned of the catastrophic consequences of the pandemic on the poor and hungry.⁵ By establishing a pandemic emergency fund, Welthungerhilfe enabled its country offices and partner organizations in program countries to quickly launch educational campaigns about the virus and set up hygiene measures or reinforce existing ones. In addition, as a result of its global COVID-19 appeal, Welthungerhilfe developed a program that will provide life-saving emergency assistance, education,

Drought, floods and corona variant from South Africa – multiple crises complicate life for the people of Zimbabwe

Having dealt with Cyclone Idai two years ago, followed by a long period of drought, Zimbabwe is now beset by heavy rains and flooded fields, as well as the spread of the highly contagious South Africa coronavirus variant. Based on observations and information collected from local health experts, Welthungerhilfe's country office estimates that the actual number of infections is 10 to 20 times higher than those officially reported. According to local health experts, only those cases which exhibit symptoms are tested and there is no contact tracing in place. The heavy rains are not only destroying fields and impending harvests, they are also causing latrines to overflow. Diseases such as cholera and typhoid are therefore expected to rise. Furthermore, lockdowns and school closures are having a devastating impact on girls and young women in the country: the number of teenage pregnancies has increased tremendously, while domestic violence, abuse, prostitution (sex for food), and underage marriages are on the rise.

In Zimbabwe, Welthungerhilfe is focusing on prevention and resilience building. This calls for medium and long-term integration of emergency aid and development measures in various sectors. In addition to COVID-19 education programs, improvements to water supply and hygiene infrastructure, and the distribution of food vouchers to the hungry, Welthungerhilfe is imple-



Planning to make repairs to a faulty well, Zimbabwe

menting a number of long-term prevention programmes in agricultural training centres, trainees have the opportunity to learn new farming methods, innovative production techniques, as well as the fundamentals of business and marketing. Another project involves the development of an early warning system to predict droughts and take action ahead of time.

⁴ IFPRI: "[Impacts of COVID-19 on people's food security: Foundations for a more resilient food system](#)", 2021

⁵ Welthungerhilfe: "[COVID-19: 'Health crisis threatens food crisis'](#)", 2020

water and hygiene measures, food supplies and direct cash payments to five million people in 36 countries over the next two years.⁶ The overarching focus is on sustainable reconstruction and resilience building, thus ensuring people are better protected against future crises. The program is financed by private donations and public funds from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the German Federal Foreign Office.

COVID crisis raises awareness of global interconnectedness

The COVID pandemic has now claimed more than two and a half million lives through direct health effects alone.⁷ Given how interdependent the world has become, the fight against the virus can only be won globally or not at all. The pandemic has shown how vulnerable the living situations of many people are and how little they can do to combat a crisis of this kind and recover quickly. In other words, "business as usual" is not an option.

What needs to happen now:

Strengthen food security measures:

- Ensure financial assistance and emergency aid are available to people in acute need. Guarantee access to people in need, even in conflict situations. Focus on those who are most vulnerable and leave no one behind.
- Make sure humanitarian funds meet the increased global need; close funding gaps in international humanitarian appeals.
- Maintain and further expand food security programs (e.g. school meals).
- Support smallholder farmers and small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises, and help them reduce pandemic-related losses.
- Establish or expand basic social security programs in

developing countries.

Fight pandemics / prevent future health crises:

- Ensure access to clean water and basic sanitation for all.
- Strengthen health systems and invest in establishing or expanding universal health systems in the Global South in the medium term to build up resilience to future crises.
- Ensure equitable, efficient vaccine distribution. Use all legal options to boost global vaccine production.

Reinforce crisis prevention

- Reduce communities' vulnerability to the consequences of crises and strengthen their resilience. Improve risk analyses, participation of vulnerable populations, and preventive measures such as safety nets and essential infrastructure.
- Strengthen anticipatory humanitarian aid and provide flexible resources that can be deployed rapidly for this purpose. Continue to promote the localization of humanitarian aid in line with the Grand Bargain agreements.

Drawing lessons from the crisis, initiating change

- Focus international development policy more strongly on the transformation of food systems into inclusive, sustainable and resilient systems. Food-insecure groups should have access to a healthy diet at all times. Policymakers should set the framework conditions and create the necessary structures to facilitate this.
- Strengthen local and regional food markets.
- Ensure policies that shape national, regional and global supply chains are coherent and unwaveringly respect human rights, such as the human right to food.

⁶ Welthungerhilfe: "[COVID-19 Appeal](#)", 2020

⁷ World Health Organization: "[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Dashboard](#)"

Bonn/Berlin, 2021-04-01

Contact: **Asja Hanano**, Head of Policy and External Relations

Email: policy@welthungerhilfe.de