

Newsletter A+FS and e+i|EPS / April 2020

The A+FS Network publishes its Newsletter together with the Employment and Income Network and the Competence Center for the Engagement with the Private Sector (EPS). Please select your area of interest: [Agriculture and Food Security](#) | [Vocational Skills Development](#) / [Private Sector Development](#) / [Financial Sector Development](#) / [EPS](#)

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COVID-19 and Food Systems



The COVID-19 outbreak poses huge challenges for the global community. While at the beginning the focus has mainly been on health issues, it has become clear that this crisis will have big impacts on all areas of society.

The SDC A&FS Network focuses on the impacts of COVID-19 on food systems in developing countries. We have set up a [dedicated COVID-19 page](#) where we collect and regularly update information and inputs from Network Members. Some priorities identified so far:

- Broaden the focus on implications for food systems ...
- Stabilise food systems and keep national and international food trade open ...
- Increase health efforts to protect work force along the whole food supply chain ...
- Extend social protection ...
- Promote healthy food ...
- [read more](#)

What do you think? What are the challenges and the main actions required?

[Send your opinions, experiences and inputs to Ueli Mauderli and Lou Curchod!](#)



Voice from the field

Also read what Divya Kashyap of SDC India has to say about the COVID-19 situation in her country and impacts on food security as well as SDC projects!

Dare the adventure of live or virtual peer-coaching!



[by Mélanie Surchat] The Agriculture and Food Security Network encourages f2f and virtual peer exchanges by posting relevant requests of Swiss cooperation offices on the Shareweb. In this video Benoît Meyer-Bisch - former Deputy Director in Benin, now in Mongolia – explains why he highly recommends the peer coaching experience. [Watch the short video \(French with English subtitles\)](#)

Market systems approach creates opportunities for youth



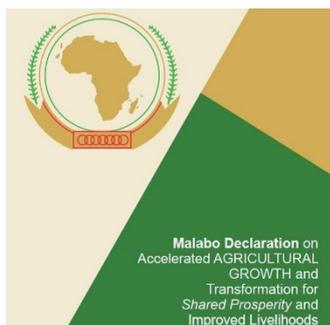
[by ILO] Rural youth have experienced first-hand how tough agriculture can be – they've worked on family farms and have survived on subsistence for as long as they remember. They know that the challenges aren't going away any time soon, so they are running away. The Yapasa project in Zambia designed a model to link producers and trusted buyers more directly – providing smallholders with a secure and assured market for their commodities and the buyers with more products with limited risk or cost... [\[read more\]](#)

Responsible Nomads in Mongolia



[by Enkh-Amgalan Tseelei] To combat ecosystem degradation across the Mongolian rangelands, SDC's Green Gold Animal Health Project works on innovations in grazing management. A new, comprehensive approach called resilience-based rangeland management was introduced to initiate management changes leading to recovery of desired rangeland states. Resilience-based rangeland management is focused on the sustainable production of meat, fibre, and other environmental goods and services in the face of environmental and societal variability... [\[read more\]](#)

Africa is not on-track towards 2025 agricultural transformation goals



[by Addis Teshome & Peter Sidler] According to the agricultural transformation goals and targets set out in the Malabo Declaration, 36 Member States registered general positive progress. However only few countries are defined as on-track and the rate of progress of many member states is slower than required... [\[read more\]](#)

View farmers as clients instead of beneficiaries



[by Dr. Syeda Zinia Rashid] Poverty is widespread and deep in hard-to-reach remote areas such as riverine islands (named chars) in Bangladesh. The 'Making Markets Work for the Chars'(M4C) project proves that with access to focused information, appropriate technical assistance and risk-sharing, private businesses can introduce commercially viable models to do business with char farmers who were traditionally viewed as 'beneficiary' but not 'clients'... [read more]

News | Your comments 

BFH-HAFL launches new institute



The “Hugo P. Cecchini Institute for international cooperation and development” launched by the Berne University of Applied Sciences, School of Agricultural, Forestry and Food Sciences (BFH-HAFL) carries out applied interdisciplinary research and consulting services to contribute to the development of sustainable smallholder agriculture, and of the forestry and food sectors, in developing and transition countries ... [read more]

New video on agro-ecology vs. agro-industry



How does agro-ecology contribute to the development of more sustainable food systems? - Horacio Augstburger, PhD student at CDE (University of Bern) developed the agroecosystem service capacity index (ASC-Index), a tool to assess a broader view on efficiency of food systems.. In this video-clip, he takes the viewer to Bolivia and Kenya and compares agro-ecological systems with the agro-industry. [watch video]

Variety is the source of life



Today's supermarkets display a huge selection of groceries. But the impression is misleading: In fact, half of all plant-based calories come from only three species – rice, maize, and wheat – while 93% of global meat supplies come from just four animal species – pigs, poultry, cattle, and buffalo. This factsheet outlines causes and consequences of agrobiodiversity loss, areas of promise, and options for policy and research... [read more]

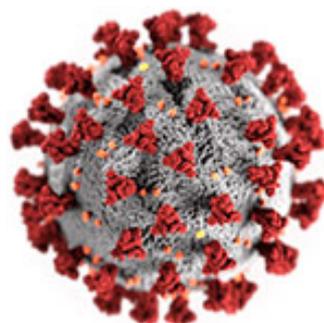
National meeting on seeds in Nicaragua



The National Alliance "Semillas de Identidad" (founded years ago by SWISSAID) organized an event to exchange knowledge and experiences about seed production and management aspects of local seed banks. Local seed varieties such as local maizes and beans are more adaptable and thus more resistant to climate change and have higher yields and better nutritional properties. Seed exchanges between local farmers are thus essential... [\[read more\]](#)

Events | [Your comments](#) 

Online events: Food system under COVID-19



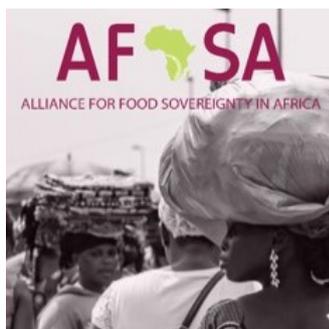
The A&FS Network is currently planning an online event series on food systems under COVID-19. A first event is planned for May. Further events may follow in the course of the year. The idea is to prepare the ground for a F2F meeting that will be organised once such meetings are again possible and useful. **The F2F announced for 31 August to 3 September 2020 is postponed.**

#agroecology-works!



The r4d programme and Biovision invite you to an r4d "Lunch" about a new analysis of financial flows for agricultural research for development and including a pre-screening of the documentary "Food Systems Caravan West Africa". Due to the corona virus the organizers are rearranging the event and an online meeting will take place on the 22nd and/or 23rd April with a decentralised viewing of an early version of the documentary film. The face-to-face event is postponed to the time when this is again possible. [\[read more\]](#)

3rd African Food Systems Conference



From 15 to 19 September 2020, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) is organizing the 3rd African Food Systems Conference on markets for healthy African food systems. The conference will take place in Harare, Zimbabwe, in conjunction with the Annual Harare Food and Seed Festival. The main theme of the conference will be: Markets for Healthy Food Systems: what kind of markets do we need for the transition to agroecology? [\[read more\]](#)



Divya Kashyap
Senior Thematic Advisor, SDC India

What does the current situation look like in your country, what were the measures from the government and how are people reacting to it?

The number of COVID-19 cases stands at a little over 3000 (as on 5th April, 2020), which seems rather low for a country with 1.3 billion people. Some feel that these low numbers are owing to low rate of testing, while others believe that the country is managing to avoid the scale up in the number of cases because of early steps taken by the Government towards awareness raising, quarantine and stopping international flights. While the number (3000) itself is perhaps not so worrying, what is of concern is the potential for exponential growth in the number of infected people because of the very high prospect for community transmission (owing to high population density) combined with relatively poor health infrastructure.

The Government of India, with the aim to prevent community transmission of the virus has essentially put the entire country under a **three-week lockdown since 25th March 2020**. This essentially means that all offices, shops, manufacturing sector, construction activity, public transport, schools, colleges, Universities are not allowed to operate. The only exception to this are local grocers and online food delivery, milk and vegetable booths, medical stores, newspapers, hospitals and health care facilities and essential municipal services like water, electricity, fire protection and garbage collection which are allowed to operate. In the rural areas, the farmers are allowed to undertake agricultural operations in the morning hours.

Since announcing the lockdown, the **Government has announced a USD 22.6 billion package** covering a range of measures, to help ensure the provision of food and other essentials to the people. The public distribution system, which is the backbone of India's food security drive, is providing 5 kg of rice or wheat plus a kilo of pulses free of cost for the next three months to 800 million poor families. In addition, the Government has announced monthly cash transfers of USD 6.6 for 200 million women, USD 13.3 for 30 million senior citizens and free gas cylinders for 83 million poor families for the next three months. Government is providing an insurance cover of USD 69'000 per health worker fighting COVID-19. However, many analysts question whether these supplies and benefits can be distributed in time.

One of the worst sufferers of this lockdown are the **migrant labourers and daily wage earners** who have limited savings and have temporarily lost their jobs and are therefore unable to access food and essential items to sustain themselves. In the aftermath of the panic created by the sudden lockdown, mass movement of migrant labour from cities to their native villages was observed in northern India, as the migrants were concerned about their survival in the cities in the absence of daily income. The general poverty and lack of income for many Indian women could hinder food and nutrition security, particularly for those whose

partners have lost work. The children too are suffering because of closure of childcare centres and schools because of which no midday meals being served.

To address this concern, the various state governments have set up community kitchens offering free food at various locations. Many state governments have also **expanded social protection measures** during the crisis. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, factory workers – many of them migrants from other states, will receive rice, pulses, oil and sugar free of charge, along with cash support of USD 13.3 to meet other urgent expenses for the next two months. Rickshaw and taxi drivers and construction workers will also have access to these measures. Many private sector entities and NGOs are being encouraged by the government to step up efforts to provide food and cash handouts to the worst affected populations.

As for the general public **in the cities, at the moment the disruptions are minimal** as food supplies have been adequate, with strict action against hoarding. Price spikes are being observed for perishable commodities like vegetables and fruits, but not for major staples which are in adequate supply. The Government has allowed movement of trucks and trains to especially ferry food items across the country.

As per the media reports, while a **large section of the population is sincerely adhering to the lockdown**, there are stray instances of some individuals venturing out. The state police force has been tasked to warn and /or even punish such offenders in order to deter such action. The fact that the country has not seen a major spike in number of COVID-19 infected people, despite the high density of population especially in the cities, has enhanced the overall support for the lockdown among the vast majority. The good quality air and reduction in noise pollution are an added bonus for the citizens.

How is COVID-19 affecting your daily work? If working remotely, experiences so far, best practices, tips for colleagues.

COVID-19 has pushed us into a unique situation of **extended work from home**, which probably not many of us have experienced before. What makes this situation especially unique is that it is not only us but our entire family at home and we are having to balance “work from home with work at home”. Technology /Internet has emerged as an indispensable tool in this situation, there are of course periods when the network is completely congested thereby affecting the connectivity. For me personally, what has worked well is to engage the entire family in sharing domestic responsibilities and not trying to do everything on my own.

In your domain of intervention, what are the most immediate effects you are (expecting) to see?

The biggest immediate effect because of lockdown is the **inability of the project implementation partners to undertake any activities on the ground**. The entire government administration has been roped into responding to the crisis, and as a result engaging with them and seeking their views on any project related outputs/discussions is at the moment not possible. This is likely to lead to delays in completing some of the project activities, especially the ones that were planned for the first six months of the year.

In the RIICE project (a crop insurance programme offering also agricultural services), the partners are required to visit the agricultural fields in project districts to validate the results from the remote sensing imageries. However, because of the lockdown it is not possible to do so. This would effectively lead to loss of the results for the winter cropping season which the project partners have been processing in their labs.

In the long term, one of the worries that affects most of our projects is that the partners might see **budget cuts in the government programmes** because of funds being diverted towards

COVID related action as well as later on for kick-starting the economy. This could potentially affect the leveraging potential that was foreseen in the project development stage.

What are the most pressing needs and demands of your partners on the ground? (Financing, technical assistance, other)

At the present moment, none of the SDCs Government partners in India have come forth seeking any special assistance from SDC/Switzerland. The National Disaster Management Authority of India has informally sought **information on how Switzerland is handling the current crisis** in order to improve their own response measures.

As far as implementation partners are concerned, only some partners whose contracts were about to come to an end have come forth seeking cost neutral extensions on their ongoing contracts.

Some of the partner agencies with whom SDC has in past worked to provide humanitarian aid in the aftermath of disasters have sought **financial assistance in order to provide immediate support** to provide free food, provide essential health care services and financial assistance to migrants and daily wage earners. SDC India is exploring options to provide support through the modality of “small action”.

How could SDC headquarter best possibly support you to containing the impact of COVID-19 for your partners and beneficiaries?

There is an immediate need to support efforts to **distribute food and essential sanitation services** in order to provide relief to the poor and the most vulnerable population, including women and children. This is a big challenge for India which counts 369 million people among the most deprived, as per the United Nations’ 2019 Multidimensional Poverty Index. Also, it is critical to help the authorities to **strengthen health care services in small towns and rural areas** which are ill equipped to address this crisis.

As far as the country’s food security is concerned, there are fears that the standing crops might be lost because of **lack of availability of labour and machinery** because of lockdown which could lead to a rise in the prices of staples. This has already affected the tea industry which has lost the first flush pickings. At the global level, this could imply that India will probably cut down on the export of certain food items, thereby affecting the prices.

In the case Switzerland with its robust start up ecosystem, comes up with **solutions for low cost testing, protective medical gear as well as medicines** to counter such outbreaks, it would be most welcome by the country. Partnership for future research in this domain may be explored.

Your Comments

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(only for logged-in [members](#))