United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Expert Group Meeting on Population, Food Security, Nutrition and Sustainable Development

New York, 28-30 October 2020

Summary points

DAY 1

Introduction and scene setting

- Challenge of preparing CPD reports that keep long-term trends in view, while also giving due attention to evolving evidence on the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on livelihoods, food security and nutrition
- Transforming food systems offers one of the single strongest opportunities we have to change course and realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda, and to "build back better" from COVID-19
- The Food Systems Summit is intended unleash bold new actions, innovative solutions, and strategies to transform food systems and leverage these shifts to deliver progress across all of the SDGs
- The Summit must be both a "People's Summit" and a "Solutions Summit": seek to get all ideas on the table and to ensure action is owned and driven by different actors, raise awareness that all must work together to transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food
- CPD can contribute to broader processes by advancing the substantive knowledge base, including the megatrends under way, and by building expert consensus on concrete policy actions

Food security, nutrition and health

- The number of people affected by hunger has been on the rise since 2014, and the COVID-19 pandemic may add between 83 and 132 million people additional undernourished people in the world in 2020. About 2 billion people experience moderate or severe food insecurity.
- The cost of healthy diets is beyond the reach of those at the poverty line; urgent action is needed to make healthy diets affordable to all and this shift needs to unfold in a sustainable way
- Nutrition indicators are not on track for SDG targets, and COVID-19 is exacerbating malnutrition in all its forms: estimated increase in child wasting, service coverage reductions; note also relationship of overweight and NCDs to COVID risk
- For maternal, sexual and reproductive health, risks related to COVID-19 include limited access to nutritious food, fear of COVID-19 and mobility restrictions deterring care seeking, social exclusion, GBV concerns
- More data is needed for fuller understanding of COVID impacts

COVID-19 and food security

- COVID-19 compounds and exacerbates preexisting weaknesses and crises in the food system
- COVID-19 is increasing poverty and food insecurity through complex pathways; the impacts will change over time and affect all dimensions of food security
- Approaches to COVID-19 response are intertwined with policy shifts needed for longer-term achievement of food security and nutrition and achieving SDGs
- In Africa, COVID-19 has reduced international trade, reduced exports and reduced local supply and demand
- COVID-19 is inhibiting crisis response; creative solutions include technology and digital transformation
- Reverse migration to poor households could contribute to food insecurity and should be monitored more closely; food security of involuntary migrants is also a concern
- Importance of incentivizing youth in agricultural sector

DAY 2

Future outlook for food systems, climate and environment

- Achieving national dietary guidelines would lead to improvements in health; they are not sufficient for meeting global environmental targets
- Accounting for the full health and environment costs of foods and diets could incentivize change towards healthy and sustainable diets
- Linkages between human pressures, land use and zoonotic diseases
- Complex tools and methods needed to improve understanding of and responses to global system risks, such as the combined effects of pandemics and climate change
- Latest climate model projections show potential for higher temperature increases with ensuing more negative effects on agriculture
- Direct and indirect impacts of COVID are changing the baseline and possible scenario narratives for modelling of environmental futures; need to emphasize resilience in addition to efficiency
- Integrated strategies, combining conservation, supply side and demand side factors, are needed to "bend the curve" on environmental impacts
- Triggers of change include institutions and governance; consumer awareness; income-wealth distribution, and technologies

Data including big data, innovation and technology

- Innovation for transformation involves challenging the status quo (rules, institutions, practices).
- Divergence more around how technology is accessed, used and controlled rather than the fundamental nature of technologies themselves
- Agroecology as a modern response to today's challenges, contributes to resilience
- Need to fill in the "missing middle" between international commitments and field/farm/forest level
- New data strategies including web scraping, text mining, artificial intelligence, geospatial data providing automated analysis and early warning signals
- We need a critical assessment of Big Tech's narratives of empowerment, democratization and decentralization
- Focus on new forms of hierarchies, power asymmetries and dependencies created through data infrastructures; think of alternative infrastructures instead (i.e. data commons; open source, data sovereignty etc.)

Food system transformation

- The agri-food sector has a critical role in developing and emerging economies as a source of jobs, export earnings, etc.; but major challenges to decent work
- COVID-19 reducing working hours and labour income, particularly in informal economy
- Need to invest in workforce development, ensure technological innovation is “people driven”, promote formalization, empower women, youth, vulnerable groups
- Gender gaps in food security, secure employment, land rights, financial inclusion
- Gender analysis of COVID-19 impacts finds that women report large impacts on livelihoods, work burden
- High-quality, sex-disaggregated data especially on women’s role agriculture, women’s employment, empowerment and welfare is rarely collected in household and agricultural surveys
- Rapid urbanization has a large influence on agricultural supply systems, including on wages and input prices
- Urban officials become key agricultural policy makers

DAY 3

Regional Outlook

- Local context and priorities
- Lack of resilience to climate change and pandemic
- Need for institutional mechanisms for integrative programs; employment opportunities that can reduce inequality; social protection policies
- Rise in inequality during pandemic, exacerbating poverty and existing problems with affordability of healthy diets
- Supply chains and international trade
- Efficient and sustainable production
- Political and financial commitment; efficient use of scarce resources

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Thank you.