

UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food
Call for input - Impact of the COVID-19 on the right to food

Submission by the Asia Chapter/Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition

This is the submission of the Asia Chapter of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition (GNRTFN) focusing on India and Indonesia.¹ All information provided below is be considered complementary to the [Joint COVID-19 Monitoring Report on the Impacts of the Right to Food and Nutrition](#), released by the Asia Chapter/GNRTFN in December 2020.

1. At what points over the past two years, and how, has the food system in your country been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic? Have there been any specific sectors and locations that were more impacted?

The report released in 2019 provides the answers to this question. Please refer to the report.

2. What were the challenges in overcoming reduced access to adequate food and nutrition and interrelated impacts on other human rights during the crisis?

In **India**, there were several challenges and interrelated impacts on other human rights during the crisis, particularly the right to health, the right to work, and the right to education. According to the Hunger WATCH² II Survey conducted by the Right to Food Campaign India, 23% of the households interviewed incurred a major health expenditure. Among these households, 13% incurred an expenditure of more than 50,000 INR (approximately 650 USD) and 35% of more than 10,000 INR (approximately 130 USD). The situation worsened due to the lack of adequate wages. 32% of the households reported that family members have stopped working or lost wages due to COVID-19. The lack of wages has also generated a negative impact on children, particularly their right to education. The children are facing difficulties in attending school. The Survey revealed that at least one in six households faced school dropout and many of these children are entering the workforce, as reported at least by one in every 6 households.³

3. Which segments of the population – e.g. migrants, agriculture workers, Indigenous peoples – have been more vulnerable and constrained in accessing adequate, nutritious and healthy food throughout the different phases of the pandemic? What were their main sources of procuring food? Which new risks and vulnerabilities in food access have you observed to emerge during the pandemic?

¹ The two contributing organisations are the Right to Food Campaign India and FIAN Indonesia.

² The Right to Food Campaign in association with the Centre for Equity Studies and some other networks and organisations conducted the first Hunger Watch survey after the national lockdown in 2020 with three broad objectives: 1) to track and document the hunger situation among vulnerable communities through in-person surveys, 2) to coordinate local action demanding access to rights and entitlements as a follow up to the survey, and 3) to draw public attention to the scale of the problem and build public consciousness around the prevailing situation of hunger in the country. The report of the first round of the survey that was conducted in November 2020 can be found here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bpmxHXefEGF0ggZLVHGzTgCh1oc9JSYy/view>.

³ These numbers are calculated from the full sample, some households of which might not have young children, and hence are likely to be conservative estimates of the impact on child education and labor.

COVID-19 challenged several segments of the society in *Indonesia*: Formal and informal workers experienced layoffs, small-scale food producers faced difficulties in distributing and selling their products, and urban poor was hardly able to maintain their jobs. Due to the non-possession of local IDs, many migrant workers were not recognized as social safety net receivers, and transgender communities and people with disabilities were also highly impacted due to the existing stigma in accessing work opportunities.

Many studies in *India* have highlighted the debilitating impact of the pandemic and the associated economic slowdown, particularly in the informal sector. Despite the eminent role played by the workers, both in terms of their contribution to the national GDP as well as to the overall workforce of the country, the situations and conditions of workers, particularly in the informal sector, have slightly worsened over the last two years.⁴ It is estimated that an additional 230 million individuals have fallen below the daily wage threshold of Rs 375 per day (less than 5 USD).⁵ In fact, there is evidence suggesting increased informality even among salaried workers.⁶ The previous survey (Hunger Watch I) conducted by the Right to Food Campaign end of 2020 showed the grave situation of hunger six months after the national lockdown in March 2020. During that time, many households reported lower levels of income (62%), worsened nutritional quality (71%) and a decrease in the quantity of food consumed (66%) compared to the pre-lockdown period. Hunger Watch-II shows that many of these issues remain pressing concerns even now.

Children suffered substantially from the impact of COVID-19. The closure of schools and anganwadi centers (courtyard shelters) has affected the nutritional intake of children during the pandemic. According to the survey, a quarter of households with eligible members said that they did not receive any provisions provided by the Mid-Day Meal Schemes or Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The loss of free meals imposed an additional burden on families who may have been already facing enormous challenges in feeding themselves.

4. What kind of food price variations, trade restrictions, and supply chain disruptions have had the most impact on main foodstuffs, nationally and locally?

In *Indonesia*, vulnerability has intensified not only due to low income but also the rise in food prices (such as palm oil, tempeh, and tofu) as seen in early 2022. For tempeh and tofu, the main reason was the rising global soybean prices. Indonesia depends heavily on soybean imports (about 90%) to meet its domestic needs. The price increase for palm oil is due to several complex factors, associated with the long distribution chain and logistical challenges, which delayed its distribution. The price of crude palm oil (CPO) is now at Rp. 13.244 (0,93 USD) per kilogram, which is a 77% increase compared to January 2021. However, other root causes are the dominance of four large companies (Wilmar International Ltd, Indofood Agri Resources Ltd, Musim Mas

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⁵ NCEUS. 2008. Contribution of the Unorganised Sector to GDP Report of the Sub Committee of a NCEUS Task Force. New Delhi

⁶ Abraham, R and Amit Basole, Jan 7, 2022, The India Forum <https://bit.ly/33H4Soz>

Group, and Royal Golden Eagle International) which control palm oil sales⁷ and corruption regarding the approval of Crude Palm Oil export licenses, are making palm oil prices very prone to increase.⁸ Palm oil is a strategic commodity that gains many benefits because it is the main contributor to the country's foreign exchange, but its operations and plantation development have been known to cause many human rights violations, ranging from land grabbing, indigenous people dispossession, environmental and biodiversity destruction, exploitation of workers including women workers who experience sexual harassment and agrotoxic poisoning, and impoverishment of surrounding communities.⁹ This problem shows that agribusiness corporations continue to abuse the right to food and nutrition of people with the state's permission, which is detrimental to both essential rights-holders on the upstream side (plantation workers) and downstream side (consumers and small scale food sellers). As a consequence, many food sellers and small-medium enterprises found it difficult to reduce their production costs, obtain proper and profitable income, and fulfill their right to food and nutrition.

5. What beneficial or counter-productive measures have been deployed nationally and locally (laws, policies, fiscal measures, or social security/social safety nets) in the aftermath of the pandemic? What impact have they had on ensuring access to adequate food and nutrition? What was the role of workers, small-scale food producers, and the agri-food industry in the development and implementation of these measures?

It is to be highlighted that in *Indonesia*, in contrary to the first period during which COVID-19 cases skyrocketed and the government distributed social safety net in a form of food and financial aid, from May to July 2021, there was no social aid transferred to help the poor and marginalized.¹⁰ Therefore, many people were forced to take up loans in order to fulfill basic needs, including food. Considering that the poor population in Indonesia do not have adequate and stable income, and are likely to spend more than 50% of their income on food-related expenses, this will affect their economic recovery in the longer term. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2022) shows that there has been a decrease in the average wage received by workers/employees/laborers during the pandemic. The decline in wages occurred as a result of the sluggish economy hit by the pandemic. Restrictions on people's movement have reduced consumption and demand for goods and services.¹¹

Some additional information is available in the 2020 report.

⁷ See Bisnis Tempo's news (February 1, 2022) "4 Great Oil Palm Producer in Indonesia" <https://bisnis.tempo.co/read/1556268/4-jawara-produsen-minyak-goreng-di-indonesia/full&view=ok> and Tribun Bisnis's news (January 25, 2022) "KPPU: Indonesian Cooking Oil Industry Structure Leads to Oligopoly" <https://www.tribunnews.com/bisnis/2022/01/25/kppu-struktur-industri-minyak-goreng-indonesia-mengarah-ke-oligopoli>

⁸ See TV One News (April 19, 2022) "The Attorney General's Office Names 4 Suspects of Alleged Cooking Oil Corruption, One of them is the Director General at the Ministry of Trade" https://www.tvonenews.com/berita/nasional/37027-kejaugung-tetapkan-4-tersangka-dugaan-korupsi-cpo-salah-satunya-dirjen-perdagangan-luar-negeri-kemendag?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter

⁹ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fNGO%2fIDN%2f46760&Lang=en

¹⁰ See Project Multatuli's Report, "We Are Suffocated: Losing Incomes, Losing Lives in Jakarta City During the Covid-19 Outbreak" <https://projectmultatuli.org/kami-sesak-napas-hilang-nafkah-hilang-nyawa-di-kampung-kota-jakarta-saat-wabah-covid-19/>

¹¹ See Kompas' News (April 20, 2022) "The pandemic erodes the wages of workers" <https://www.kompas.id/baca/telaah/2022/04/18/pandemi-menggerus-upah-pekerja>

6. What longer-term measures, if any, have been considered, nationally and locally, to address harmful impacts of the continued pandemic, as well as of future shocks? What lessons could be drawn from the pandemic about how to make your food systems more equitable, resilient and sustainable? In which way should the food system of your country be reformed in order to ensure better access to adequate food to everyone?

In *Indonesia*, many grassroots organizations and CSOs have learned that producing and providing food independently to be consumed collectively (e.g. through collective farming, barter, farmer-to-farmers exchange) is one crucial solution to withstand crises and resilience, particularly if the method of farming has integrated Agroecology or other sustainable agriculture principles and has cut in production costs through the use of low input. Also, diversifying marketing and/or distribution channels for crops that still target local or regional markets are more likely to enable farmers to survive amid crisis, rather than entering into one-to-one partnerships with large corporations or contract farming. These relationships often create power imbalances between corporations and farmers and may increase farmers' vulnerability due to shocks in global markets.

7. What multilateral support and resources are needed to transform food systems in terms of enhanced sustainability, equity and resilience in your country? What actions could be taken or should be avoided at the regional or global levels to strengthen and coordinate multilateral policy to address the COVID-19's impact on food security?

In *India*, looking forward to more sustainable and equitable solutions, the Government needs to ensure sincere efforts towards promotion of traditional diets and agriculture, inclusion of nutrient rich and diverse food items such as pulses, millets, oil etc. in food basket and support to small and marginal farmers. On the contrary, Government policies appear to be moving in an opposite direction towards corporatisation and centralisation of agriculture. While the hallmark of these policies - the three controversial farm laws - were rolled back after resilient protests by farmers for more than a year, these threats prevail in form of smaller policy changes which are gradually weakening the farming sector through a thousand cuts. Attempts such as centralising food procurement, dismantling of Food Corporation of India and digitisation of agriculture all fly in the face of the need to preserve India's diverse food systems. Further, the growing trend of imposition of majoritarian culture in India is also being reflected in food practices through banning of meat and eggs, which is a direct assault on traditional diets and food rights for most marginalised communities in the country. This answers both the questions 6 and 7.

8. Which initiatives have been autonomously implemented by small-scale food producers, food workers, women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and social groups? What support has been provided to these initiatives, and which of them do you consider having longer-term positive impact?

The 2020 report refers to some concrete initiatives that emerged from people and social movements during the pandemic.