



Covid-19: Pandemic exposes inequalities in global food systems

Jacqui Wise

London, UK

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the vulnerability and weaknesses of already fragile global food systems, say the authors of a new report which finds one in every nine people in the world is hungry while one in three is overweight or obese.

The Global Nutrition Report 2020 calls on governments, businesses, and civil society to step up efforts to tackle malnutrition in all its forms, as well as injustices in food and health systems.¹

The report found that an increasing number of countries experience the double burden of malnutrition, where undernutrition coexists with obesity and other diet related diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

The latest data shows that no country is on course to meet all 10 of the 2025 Global Nutrition Targets and just eight out of 194 countries are on course to meet four targets. Almost a quarter of all children under five years of age are stunted while rates of overweight and obesity are increasing rapidly in nearly every country in the world.

Most people in the world can't access or afford healthy food because of agriculture systems that are largely focused on staple grains like rice, wheat, and maize, rather than producing a broader range of more diverse and healthier foods, like fruits, nuts, and vegetables. At the same time, highly processed foods are cheap and intensively marketed.

The report was written before the current coronavirus pandemic, but David Nabarro, special envoy of the World Health

Organisation director general on covid-19, said that its emphasis on nutritional wellbeing for all, particularly the most vulnerable, has a heightened significance in the face of this new global threat.

Writing in a forward, Nabarro said, "Covid-19 does not treat us equally." He pointed out that undernourished people have weaker immune systems and may be at greater risk of severe illness from covid-19 while poor metabolic health, including obesity and diabetes, is strongly linked to worse outcomes.

"People who already suffer as a consequence of inequities—including the poor, women and children, those living in fragile or conflict affected states, minorities, refugees, and the unsheltered—are particularly affected by both the virus and the impact of containment measures," he said.

Nabarro added, "There is a real risk that, as nations strive to control the virus, the gains they have made in reducing hunger and malnutrition will be lost."

The annual Global Nutrition Report is funded by donors including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the European Commission, UK Department for International Development, and the US Agency for International Development.

1 2020 Global Nutrition Report. May 2020. <https://globalnutritionreport.org/reports/2020-global-nutrition-report>

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