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The Impact of COVID-19 Measures on Local Food Systems in Indonesia, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe - a Participatory Digital Co-Research Study

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak is spreading rapidly across the globe, forcing national governments to take decisions that have adverse effects on globalised food systems and supply chains. Border closures are disrupting commodity flows and labour force availability. As a result, food producers have difficulties harvesting and selling their produce. Informal economies and social welfare programs have also been affected, with detrimental effects on the most poor and vulnerable.

This study examines the challenges, coping strategies, and innovations of local food producers and city dwellers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research for this study was farmer-led, meaning that farmers themselves collected the data, co-designed the research, and identified innovative coping techniques to deal with the crisis. Using digital survey tools, the data was collected from producer groups in selected urban and rural centres in South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Indonesia on a weekly basis during the lockdowns in April 2020.

The results are as different as the study regions but they are all the same in one respect: farmers have limited access to their farms and markets, and are forced to develop new approaches to make their ends meet. The most striking outcome of the study is that the farmers do not perceive COVID-19 as the greatest threat to their livelihoods but rather feel threatened by social inequalities and above all, climate change. While the global lockdown experiences highlight the importance of local food systems, there is great need to support agro-ecological and climate change-resilient production systems as well as farmer-led marketing systems.

Keywords: Coping strategies, COVID-19, farmer-led research, participatory research