Impact of COVID-19 on local food systems in Southern Africa and Indonesia
A digital co-research with small-scale farmers

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Background

Timeline
Declaration of COVID-19 pandemic
- 11 March 2020
Outbreak containment approaches
- Indonesia, 15 March 2020: Large-scale social restrictions
- South Africa, 27 March 2020: Lockdown
- Zimbabwe, 30 March 2020: Lockdown
- Mozambique, 1 April 2020: State of emergency
- 1 April 2020: Start of the research
- 7 June 2020: End of data collection

Objectives of the study
- The participatory co-research investigates the impact of COVID-19 in two urban and three rural food regions in the global South.

Common perspective
- Small-scale farmers provide insights into how COVID-19 measures have affected their farming and food systems and the resilience of the food systems.
- Farmers perceive themselves as ‘responsive actors’ and not “passive victims” of the COVID-19 crisis. They want to become part of the solution.

Conclusions
Coping strategies were different in the various research sites, i.e. own family, own farming community or local government. In all areas, farmers relied mainly on agro-ecological farming and food from their own gardens.

Lockdown effects: Price hikes for all food groups; informal sector was heavily affected; no permits to visit farms; robbing vegetables; increased consumption of vegetables and staples; farmers lost their market outlets and consumed more of their own produce.

Farmers’ food security challenges after 2 months of COVID-19 containment. (Survey data, 1st week of June 2020)

What are the challenges in feeding your family?

- 10.0 9.0 8.0 7.0 6.0 5.0 4.0 3.0 2.0 1.0 0.0
- 1.0 2.0 3.0 4.0 5.0 6.0 7.0 8.0 9.0 10.0

Masvingo, Zimbabwe
- Loss of market outlets, as farmer markets and restaurants closed; sold food to local communities; hunger aggravated by the meagre harvests due to climate change and drought; women farmers are strong players in food and seed exchange.

Maputo, Mozambique
- Banning of food imports from South Africa caused price hikes, particularly for sugar, fruits; increased consumption of vegetables and staples; farmers lost their market outlets and consumed more of their own produce.

Cape Town, South Africa
- Lockdown effects: Price hikes for all food groups; informal sector was heavily restricted; township farmers often went to bed without a meal (hunger crisis); rise of community kitchens, food aid; no permits to visit farms; robbing vegetables.

Java, Indonesia
- Farmer markets partly closed, and people feared to go outside; less meat and fish consumption due to price hikes for all food groups in Java, and for meat and sugar in rural Toraja; more consumption of vegetables; farmers started growing more food in own gardens and changed to a more healthy diet, e.g. less sugar.

Toraja, Indonesia
- “Since our country has introduced protection measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we must be disinfected and the passengers need to get outside and wash their hands. Our children make face masks and we distribute them to people.”

Java, Indonesia
- “We are very strict about the use of masks in Java because this is our only way to stop the spread of COVID-19.”

Co-research methodology

“Digital data collection via Kobo Toolbox app”
- Previous experience with tool in Indonesia
- Participating farmers co-design the survey
- Pre-test by resident coordinators and translation into local language
- Data collection in four weekly surveys in April, 56 simple questions: 26 single choice, 8 binary, 8 multiple choice, 6 open-ended, 6 demographic
- Photo voice in April surveys: meal culture, farm and market challenges, solutions
- More than 700 participating farmers

Project Outputs: Fact Sheets, Presentation at the Webinar of the All-African Student’s Union (AASU), 3 Journal Papers, farmer stories on social media, digital South-South exchanges

Analysis and contextualisation
- Farmer voices and photos via social media (Facebook, Instagram, whatsapp)
- Simple graphs and tables for descriptive statistics (SPSS, MAXQDA)
- Contextualisation and validation of data with co-researchers (Zoom calls, whatsapp)

Key Findings per Research Site

Indonesia
- Indonesia, 15 March 2020: Large-scale social restrictions
- Farmers started growing more food in own gardens and changed to a more healthy diet, e.g. less sugar.

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- “You can see many fruit of the house. It is not very difficult for us to do with vegetables, fruit, rice, etc.”

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Masvingo, Zimbabwe
- “This research was funded by foundation fiat panis and Verein der Förderer und Freunde des SLE e.V.”

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