

# REFLECTIVE REPORT OF FINAL MEETING

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**Reflective report on final team meeting for the  
International Development Research Centre (IDRC) project on  
The Impacts of Covid-19 Responses on the Political Economy of African Food Systems  
held on 30 November 2021**



**AFRICAN**  
FOOD SYSTEMS

## **Introduction**

A final virtual meeting on an IDRC-funded project on “The Impacts of Covid-19 Responses on the Political Economy of African Foods Systems” was held on 30 November 2021. Researchers and civil-society activists from Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa reflected on what the project had accomplished; what it had failed to achieve; and the lessons that had been learnt as a result, including for future possible collaboration. In this regard, a number of key questions were asked:

- What has been learnt and not learnt about food systems?
- What have been the highlights and lowlights of the project as a whole?
- What has worked well, what has not, and what should be done differently next time?
- What do the participants want to do next in their work on food systems?
- What types of work and what future engagement with each other should be established, and what would be needed to enable such work?
- What more could be done with the research data that has been acquired to leverage this project beyond the endpoint envisaged with the funder?

The meeting further received a report on some of the key impressions which emerged from a recent meeting convened by IDRC to share the findings from a number of projects which it had funded to interrogate similar themes. It was reported that these other projects had also found that key aspects of national food systems had been neglected under Covid-19, including particularly those in which women, the marginalised and those on lower incomes, and pastoralists were active.

Other key reported findings from this meeting included that:

- Food systems, particularly in West Africa, were vulnerable to shocks including in relation to climate change;
- Many challenges had been experienced in relation to cross-border trade;
- There was strong resilience at the local level during the crisis, while significant risks were attached to extended supply chains; and
- Supermarkets, including French ones in West Africa, had extended their urban footprint under lockdown, at the same time that the impacts on supermarkets in other regions were quite variable, with some struggling, while others moved forward.

### **1. What has been learnt?**

What has been learnt (and not learnt) about food systems during the course of this project? What new insights have been produced and what questions remain unanswered?

The food systems in the three countries under study – Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa – were already weak in a number of ways before the arrival of Covid-19. In this regard, the pandemic and the responses to it exposed and highlighted the existence of vulnerabilities to which little attention had previously been paid. For example, the responses to the pandemic produced significant impacts even in Tanzania, although the initial lockdown there was not that protracted. In this regard, it is also noteworthy that the impacts of the lockdowns were not confined to the particular areas where they were imposed. For example, in

Ghana, although lockdowns were only implemented in certain parts, the food system across the entire country was affected.

The national government responses to the pandemic confirmed the existence of significant bias in official policymaking in favour of corporate actors in the food system. Governments subsidised this sector while largely leaving informal food-system actors to their own devices, or even, as in the South African case, victimising them by removing them from the spaces they were occupying. In general, the bigger and the more formal the actor, the more likely they were to receive support from the state; while the smaller and the more informal the actor, which in Ghana's case often the women in the system, the more likely they were to be ignored or abandoned. In this regard, official pro-poor rhetoric was not backed by action.

The research also observed contradictions between what was happening on the ground and what the government claimed was happening. For example, in Ghana the government's pronouncements about price stability were contradicted by price hikes at food markets. The divergence between the political framing of the issue and the actual experiences of the people indicates a failure on the part of regulators to anticipate and/or understand the impacts on the ground.

The research found that the "informal sector" was quite resilient under Covid-19 by comparison with large food suppliers where operations could be disrupted by a breakdown at any point along quite extended supply chains. However, notwithstanding the relative strength of the informal sector and its crucial role in supporting low-income earners, it received little official recognition or support.

Online trading expanded under Covid-19, although the benefits of this growth were not equitably distributed – giving rise to the question: How can the exploitation of digital platforms produce more equitable benefits?

Participants in the project learnt more about the fish sector as an aspect of food systems.

The research revealed the extent of the dependence on imports (for example, Ghana's reliance on onions and tomatoes from Burkina Faso and Niger) and the precarious nature of the cross-border food trade in times of shock. In this regard, livelihoods were damaged when countries failed to collaborate in support of trade and adopted parochial national responses instead – as happened between Tanzania and its neighbours in the East African Community (EAC) despite their membership of the same regional economic bloc.

There was a great variety of gendered divisions of labour across the food systems in the three countries under study – and thus the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on women also varied, although there were some common themes. For example, in Ghana, official restrictions led to an increasing burden of care and changing work patterns for women. For example, women taking produce to markets were forced to rotate; and there was a move to hawking because the number of customers coming to market fell. Meanwhile, in Tanzania, women were particularly affected by disruptions in cross-border trade which was previously a crucial source of food and livelihoods for them.

The project provided a unique opportunity to research food systems at the forefront of many of the challenges being faced by the three countries under study over the past two years. Against this background, the emphasis within the research on the web of relationships underpinning the food system produced a holistic perspective, embracing all aspects of the system from production to distribution and waste disposal; and addressing issues of power, wealth and influence.

In this regard, a particular point of interest has been the extent to which supermarkets in Ghana have benefited as market women have struggled. The supermarkets won customers by making them feel safer and even by selling food at lower prices than at some of the markets. The supermarkets also gained influence by playing the part of “good citizens” who were willing to comply with Covid-19 measures by contrast with so-called “troublesome” market women.

The research also enabled interrogation of stressors within the system that pre-dated Covid-19. For example, some artisanal fishermen in Ghana emphasised the competition they faced from Chinese trawlers; as well as problematic debt relations between themselves and the women buying their catches. These fishermen, who were quite savvy in using their power as a voting bloc to lobby for their interests, saw Covid-19 as just one more issue to be managed – and a less important one than other stressors within the system.

The research provided strong evidence of the resilience of existing webs of relationships within the food system – for example, through the recalibration of credit relations and through the adoption of innovative methods of production and distribution. However, what was less clear was which of these recalibrations and innovations were likely to be short-term and which were likely to be more permanent in terms of their effects on the food system.

The research found that the strongly gendered nature of the food system was either ignored or deeply misunderstood by the state, which, in some instances, resulted in government responses to Covid-19 which actually increased the social reproductive burden on women.

Some small-scale farmers found local environmental factors to be more harmful to their efforts to produce livelihoods than Covid-19 and the official responses to the pandemic.

During the hard lockdown in South Africa and amid widespread looting in KwaZulu-Natal in July 2021, local markets at which small-scale farmers sold directly to people living in their immediate neighborhoods became quite vibrant. So, it is clear that, under specific circumstances, very local markets can work.

In this context, notwithstanding the significant amount of government funding provided to the farm sector under Covid-19, more could be done to support vulnerable producers on the edge of the system. For example, quite large grants were issued by the government to medium- and large-scale farmers, when as little as R15,000 to R20,000 can enable an individual to enter or sustain production for very local markets.

The research revealed the extent of the impacts of particular political decision on societal transitions, both in relation to individual actors and in relation to the food systems as a whole – for example, in terms of how people changed their diets and sources of nutrition.

The research indicated how corporations and states exploited the global pandemic to advance the power of capital.

The project’s multi-sited, whole-system approach, considering all spaces within the food system from the fields to the household dinner table, demonstrated how limiting other research approaches, such as those which focus only on rural/agrarian production or urban trade and production, can be.

The research further indicated how illuminating well-chosen contrasts among countries can be, as well as the importance of benchmarking the apparent changes that were observed under Covid-19 against the conditions that were in place before the pandemic struck.

The research revealed the importance of downstream factors such as storage and infrastructure in food systems, which is not an aspect of the system that is that well-understood in policy.

In a similar vein, the research revealed the importance of credit in relation to social reproduction, including for traders and street sellers. In this regard, it was found that the thinking about food systems and the role of governments in relation to them in crises can be so productionist in its bias that actual changes which are taking place on the ground are not identified.

The research revealed how losses were absorbed in buying and selling among informal traders, including how informal traders sought to cushion costs, taking a loss at one point so that they could make a profit elsewhere. In this regard, more such research should be undertaken to establish a greater understanding of the dynamics of informal trade.

The food system diaries were an important, innovative tool for tracking food volumes and prices at the local level during the crisis – and worked quite well in providing a sense of food flows, particularly in Ghana and Tanzania.

### ***1.1 What hasn't been learnt***

Although the data produced by the project have provided some indication of which changes may be temporary and which longer lasting, a larger question is: Are the changes that have been identified specifically a product of the Covid-19 crisis and the governance responses to it or are they representative of more generic changes that can take place in response to major external shocks, including, for example, sudden, massive exchange-rate fluctuations or drastic climate change?

The operations of small-scale producers were interrogated in depth by the research as a result of its case-study focus, but relatively few data were produced on the input industry, particularly at the global level, or on the influence of major international food firms.

The project produced few data on the political nitty-gritty of how the Covid-19 regulations were forged and implemented at the national level – that is, for example, which interests and individuals lobbied and exerted influence in backroom political deals during the process of producing these measures. Such analysis as was presented focused on the broader political economy imperatives of the national systems in the three countries, including in relation to political outcomes and how some organisations tried to influence and engage with these – rather than on the generally obscure machinations which accompanied the birth of the Covid-19 regulations themselves.

The research confirmed that there is a lack of systematic data on food systems particularly in relation to volumes and prices and especially in the informal or small-scale sector. Such data are critical to understanding and tracking what is taking place within food systems.

Some of the gaps in the data produced by the project may have been the result of a relatively unsystematic approach to gathering the appropriate data at the outset – although it is difficult at the beginning of a project to know exactly what kind of data may be needed. At the same time, efforts that were made to acquire information from some of the more formal actors within the system, such as supermarkets,

founded on their resistance to disclosing data on their operations, which presents a significant obstacle to producing a comprehensive understanding of the workings of the food system.

More could have been done to process the data emerging from the food diaries more effectively. In addition, there was not enough focus on the mapping of the data, which fell by the wayside.

## **2. What has been achieved?**

What have been the highlights and lowlights of the project as a whole? What has worked well, what has not, and what would be done differently next time?

### *2.1 Highlights*

In Ghana a series of interviews were conducted interrogating the social reproduction theme which produced interesting findings. This theme could be the focus of future work.

In relation to the issue of gender it would be interesting to find out whether the changes which took place within the domestic sphere were short-term or long-term – and to use social reproduction as a lens for this research.

The use of food diaries as research tool produced some interesting findings through returning to the same people over time with the same questions to establish the kinds of changes that had taken place.

The comparative nature of the study across countries produced some illuminating outputs.

The project's design as a collaboration among researchers at universities and civil society organisations worked quite well in South Africa and produced some important lessons for the future, although the potential of this collaborative method may not have been fully realised across the project as a whole. This method of co-producing knowledge is particularly useful as a means of supporting post-research advocacy.

The multi-country nature of the project was an eye-opener for policymakers. The findings of the research which were published in newspapers forced policy makers to reflect more deeply on the impacts of official measures on producers and other actors within the food system.

The project produced significant engagement with the media and the public in an effort to leverage the impacts of the research. In this regard, civil society partners were pleased when researchers returned and shared the research outputs with them.

In Tanzania, engagement on the research outputs led to the national ministers of finance, agriculture and trade speaking about their responses to Covid-19, including in relation to their plans for supporting small-scale producers. For example, the ministry of agriculture talked about trying to open markets for small-scale producers in the country and seeking to establish cooperation with South Sudan in support of this sector.

The collaboration with civil society organisations provided them with a platform and also ensured that their voices were heard within the project. In addition, the project fostered connections among a range of actors within the food system themselves, leading to new beneficial relationships being forged among them – for example, a number of small shop owners are now buying from small-scale farmers as a result.

The regular check-ins and meetings which were held during the course of the project helped to shape its direction and also to identify gaps that emerged along the way. The fast-paced model for the project also supported the development of researchers, including through their production of outputs, even as the research was being conducted

A social reproduction seminar which was held in September brought together students from the countries under study; deployed data produced by the project; and offered an understanding of the larger theoretical and political debates around this issue, provided an interesting model for the future. Perhaps such roundtables could be held earlier in subsequent projects of this nature.

The presentation of key themes for the project – such as social reproduction, food flows and relationships within the food system – were crucial and of value. However, they could take place earlier in the cycle of future such projects.

## *2.2 Lowlights*

The provision of stipends for food diarists was well-intentioned but the implementation was flawed. A number of the food diarists dropped out due to other commitments which affected regular data collection. In general, more could have been made of the food-diary methodology. For example, in future the material from such diaries should be analysed from the outset – and this approach should be worked into the design of the project. The diaries produced a lot of data; and if this information had been analysed systematically as it was received it would have been more productive. However, such data needs to be collected systematically in order for it to be systemically analysable.

There was violence in some of the areas where research was being conducted which restricted access to a number of sites.

It was difficult to access certain information in Tanzania, although journalists were helpful in circumventing this obstacle – once the news camera was in place, the officials were forced to respond to the issues. In the absence of such media pressure, it was difficult to source information from the government, for example, on the number of dropouts during Covid-19 school closures; as well as information from private-sector actors, who refused to divulge, for example, data on outputs such as wheat and sugar.

It was difficult to ascertain whether the blogs and other media outputs actually had any significant impact on policy-makers given the project's limited capacity to monitor and evaluate this.

There were also issues around becoming familiar with the online technologies through which much of the project work was coordinated, including Google Drive, Zoom and large WhatsApp groups.

By the end of the project, a core team had been established with representation from the three countries, including not just the co-principal investigators, but all those with some sight on what was taking place in the different countries. Such a team should have been established at the outset of the study.

The project could have engaged more firmly with the processes around the United Nations (UN) Food Systems Summit which was held in September 2021 including particularly the counter movement launched in response to this global meeting.



### **3. What is to be done next?**

What should be the next work on food systems? What future engagement with one another would be required for such work, and what else would be needed to enable it? How can the research data that has been produced for the project be leveraged further?

#### *3.1 Unfinished business*

The documentary films for South Africa and Ghana have been produced, but the film for Tanzania is still in production, and an integrated version of the three films still needs to be produced. There are also animations still to come. In addition, these materials need to be disseminated.

It has been proposed that the University of Ghana engage with radio and television around some of the themes raised by the research.

A number of journal articles were shared at the roundtable, but others still need to be produced.

There should be discussion around further use and analysis of the food-system data which emerged from the food diaries, and which may form the basis of new papers.

The cross-country comparisons should also be harvested further. In particular the work that has taken place on social reproduction may serve as a model for further comparative papers on food flows and relationships within the food system. Although there is no need to produce an additional paper on the political economy given that this theme provided the overarching framework for the project and has thus already been covered. The new papers that may be written offer a productive way of using the material already to hand.

#### *3.2 New ways of working*

The social reproduction seminar which was held as part of the project brought together students from the countries under study; deployed data produced by the project; and offered an understanding of the larger theoretical and political debates around this issue. It was of great benefit to the students involved and offers a strong model for similar future work.

There has been collaboration among the academics involved in the project on co-supervising a PhD on informal traders in Ghana. Such collaboration offers a further area for potential future cooperation, particularly in the context of ongoing work on food security with an emphasis on the role of street traders.

Comparative data garnered by the national country teams may usefully be shared going forward, in particular in support of future published work on the themes of food flows and relationships within the food system.

The Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT) has established and strengthened relationships with poultry farmers, transporters and a key fishers' organisation, as well as other stakeholders as a result of the project; and will be working further with them and women traders to explore how it can achieve some of the key recommendations that emerged from the work.

#### *3.3 Follow-up work; the next research agenda*

In response to a request from the funder, IDRC, some broad themes for potential future work were presented (see Appendix below). These included:

- Food system governance and urban formal and informal markets, with a particular emphasis on the articulation between the formal and informal sectors;
- Value capture in shifting food systems, which relates to how present transformations have shifted accumulation dynamics at various sites across the food system; and
- Food systems, precarity and social reproduction, linking this theme to issues of gender, agency and popular political responses.

Thought should be given to exploring which of the phenomena and impacts identified during the study are short-term and which are long-term – what fundamentally shifted and which responses were just a quick fix – although this may require an expensive longitudinal study.

The project has highlighted and produced significant qualitative data on the issue of informal cross-border trade in relation to fish and other types of food – such as, for example, onions imported into Ghana. However, what is lacking is quantitative information – such as in relation to pricing across formal and informal systems – which could support policy changes to promote informal trade and address the kinds of challenges that informal traders tend to face at the borders, including graft. So, it would be useful to design a study that can produce methodologies for estimating qualitative and quantitative data in relation to the cross-border trade in various commodities, including fish and crops.

A key finding that emerged from the research was the complexity of interactions between the formal and informal food systems and how the ways in which they interact are not that well understood. In this context, it seems that one of the most important impacts of the pandemic in South Africa has been how it has exacerbated long-term trends that were already in place, intensifying the ways in which the relationships between the formal and informal sectors are already being rearticulated.

In this regard, future long-term longitudinal studies should not only interrogate the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis but the broader phenomenon of food systems in disequilibrium which are being subjected to a whole range of shocks, including the pandemic and future outbreaks, as well as stressors such as climate change. For some time to come, the situation may not be one in which there could be said to be one identifiable shock from which the system can readily recover. It would be more accurate to say that increasing instability from a variety of sources will continue to shape the position of informal, smallholder actors in the economy – and indeed, that the trajectories of change in the system may even be accelerating. In this context, there is plenty of scope for seeing the current Covid-19 study as a precursor for a longer study which may interrogate some of those longer-term patterns. In other words, change is an important topic for studies looking into the future of food systems.

The project also highlighted the importance of considering the regional nature of food systems beyond a national perspective. More work needs to be undertaken to interrogate the dynamics of the trade in food at the regional level.

The social reproductive lens adopted by the project was particularly valuable as an antidote to prejudicial gendered approaches towards the role of women in fisheries adopted by scholars in Africa and elsewhere. Similarly, the project's political economy perspective provided an important lens for considering the exercise of power and inequalities in the fish system. These dynamics can otherwise be masked by crisis narratives which emphasise the ecological threats being posed to fish as a dwindling resource, without addressing the forms of economic dominance, such as foreign fleets or industrial fisheries, which distort access and the distribution of profits in the system. Given that fish are the most traded commodity and

that 200 million people on the continent are making a livelihood from inland and coastal marine resources, there is great scope for further collaboration, including among researchers and activists in South Africa, Ghana and Tanzania, on this aspect of the food system in Africa.

The project has highlighted the value of supporting and expanding the activist space, that is, the so-called “food commons”, in Africa. A model for this was provided several years ago by the Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI), which distributed some small grants and convened some regional meetings and a global conference. The initiative sought to place rural politics at the centre of questions of agrarian change, land rights and food production. It asked fundamental questions about the capacity of rural politics and agrarian and land movements to produce change, including through their connections with one another and across space. There was subsequently a proposal for reigniting some of the networks that were forged as part of ERPI, particularly in Africa; and re-convening some of the partner organisations, scholars and activists who were part of the conversations that were held at that time.

Participation in such an initiative would ensure that the focus of future research is not only on questions of production and trade etc., but also on creating spaces and platforms for learning how people are responding to increasingly top-down forms of authoritarian governance by states, and for examining the relationships between states and capital amid various crises.

It seems that a number of partnerships among academics and activists are being proposed and explored, for example, in relation to fisheries, in an effort to produce significant policy impacts from the research that has been conducted into food systems. The question in this context is: Which direction do the activist organisations – that is, the CSO partners in the project – want to take the food-system research initiated by the project; and what partnerships with universities do they envisage as part of this work?

#### **4. Final thoughts**

Future research could focus on interrogating the implications of the migration to online marketing for food systems.

Given the persistence of the Covid-19 pandemic as new variants continue to arise, a further longitudinal study examining the impacts of the crisis over time would be of value. In this regard, a particular point of interest has been how capitalist food systems have remained intact throughout the present crisis, despite predictions to the contrary at the outset of the outbreak.

The information acquired from this project on family and smallholder farmers may be leveraged to influence discussions at the national and regional levels in the wake of the UN Food Systems Summit in September 2021 and the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) which was held in October and November. Covid-19 showed that national food security cannot be assured as long as there is dependence on imports from outside the country and the region in question. For example, in a system dominated by industrial agricultural interests, the price of fertiliser inputs has risen greatly over the past year. The price rises have made this input unaffordable for many farmers and have made agriculture a more expensive activity in general. In this context, a key priority for the Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF) going forward is to address the issue of food sovereignty. In support of this, there should be greater engagement with African intergovernmental policy audiences within the region, for example,

at the annual civil society dialogue which is held before the Southern African Development Community (SADC) summit, as well as in the ongoing discourse within the East African Community.

Key policy questions which have emerged from the project include: How can food sovereignty be established? and: How can a more just and equitable food system be built? The answers to these questions are unlikely to come from corporations. In this context, the participants in this project have a responsibility to continue interacting with each other and supporting broader civil society activism for change, such as that promoted by the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM) in its efforts to engage with the UN Committee on World Food Security. In the build-up to the UN Food Systems Summit in September, CSM tried to mobilise academics to support the developmental positions and advocacy being taken by civil society groups. Further such coordination could produce significant benefits in southern Africa and at the continental level. Following the present project, civil society should say to academics: "So, you have said you're available, now make yourself available." Thus, one of the virtues of the present process may be the extent to which it can be leveraged to strengthen the collaboration between civil society and academia in pursuit of goals such as food sovereignty. In this regard, it should be acknowledged that Covid-19 has only added to the numerous pressures which small-scale farmers and fishers face – pressures that will persist whether it's a Covid-world or a post-Covid world in the future. Whatever research and activism are planned, it will be undertaken in this context.

The next project should not necessarily be another project of this kind, but should rather seek to leverage the work that has been undertaken so that it speaks to the post-food systems summit and post COP26 moment. Such future work should address the ongoing crises of food systems in Africa and the trajectories of change that have become evident in many parts of the continent; and engage with audiences who really have the power to shift the food-systems terrain accordingly.

Future work should address the various narratives of crisis relating to the environment, health and the financial sector – and what the outcomes and impacts of these narratives are for poor and marginalised groups. Future work should also address the issue of the food commons which is often linked to the notion of food sovereignty and how these commons may be strengthened, including through coordination among academics and CSOs.

The enduring benefits of the IDRC project, which has been inclusive and continental in nature, may include the network of relationships that has been established as a result, as well as the camaraderie that has been forged through the work. The project has offered an opportunity for emerging scholars to collaborate with senior researchers, providing significant mentorship as a result; and has also led the way in gender equality, with many women having been engaged in the work.

From a practical point of view, there is a need for the core group to return to the various national teams to review the key items of unfinished business, including further journal articles that may be written; future comparative research on food flows, and credit and other relationships within the food system; and proposals for future collaboration.

#### **Appendix: Summary of the presentation on future work in the narrative report to IDRC**

Our partners have expressed how much this consortium's work together is valued, and how much has been learnt. While we recognise the need to pull this project to a close, several proposals have emerged

for future work together. Civil society partners have indicated they will use the research findings and various knowledge products to inform their advocacy work and engage the government on mitigation measures to support food system actors. They foresee future collaborations on food systems with academia, CSOs, labour unions and trade associations.

Future collaboration in research could involve periodic answering to calls for research, joint development of research proposals, as well as engaging strategic partners for collaborative undertaking of research projects that can be solicited by one or more partners. The current project consortium includes a wide pool of expertise that can be tapped into, given the diverse disciplinary and technical skills that exist within our consortium.

*Food system governance and urban formal and informal markets:* The rapidly-changing shape of urban food systems and their “upstream” impacts on rural production sites is not adequately understood – either in the world of research or of policy-making. We feel strongly that this is a crucial avenue to pursuing future research. Rapid urbanisation, growing consumer markets, transnational investments in farmland, and the expansion of agro-food capital across African countries all constitute a potent combination of factors shifting power and control in food systems. While some actors have significant policy influence – especially when linked to development agency interventions, such as in the case of seed companies – sectors providing livelihoods to vast numbers of people are at risk of being excluded from key decisions, such as planning for urban food markets. Food systems and governance of food markets and related spaces is therefore a priority for next-stage work. Some of our partners are proposing continued work together, building on this project, but with a more refined theoretical and empirical focus, and likely in fewer sites.

*Value capture in shifting food systems:* As food systems evolve, new sites of value capture emerge. Our work has exposed how some long supply chains involve value capture far from sites of production – both in upstream input industries and downstream processing and (more often) retail. Assumptions that food system “formalisation” can supply cheaper nutritious food are to be questioned. There is a need to have clearer data on the food flows in what is often termed the “informal sector”. This should include more systematic price tracking and analysis of where value accumulation is happening. We need this kind of information to see how the food system can work better for accessible food and more livelihoods. Such data can then be used to support further advocacy around more inclusive and effective food systems.

*Food systems, precarity and social reproduction:* Our evidence shines a light on the issue of social reproduction and its linkage to women’s work. Across all our study areas in Ghana and South Africa, the women drawn from a range of grassroots organisations conveyed in their own words the ways in which school closures and dwindling household incomes had affected their ability to provide for their families. As women, the burden of feeding the family and managing resources, no matter how meagre, fell heavily on them and many recounted the numerous coping mechanisms they had devised to ensure that their families were fed. The containment measures developed to address Covid-19 increased the burden of care on women. Only direct cash transfers to women were able to mitigate these additional burdens – yet these often had to be redirected into recapitalising women’s businesses. We feel we are sitting on powerful data that is still to be fully utilised, especially from these two countries, which is why we convened an academic seminar on it, with globally leading theorists, and will be publishing a journal article on this, with the aim of bringing our data beyond the policy sphere into academic circulation. We are interested in women’s work and precarity – in the context of the twin crises of deagrarianisation and

deindustrialisation that beset some of our countries. This sphere of work centres on crises of social reproduction in post-agrarian contexts, in which the traditional divides between urban (industrial) and rural (agrarian) social and economic structures no longer pertain. In this context, with demographic shifts, migration changes, and labour surpluses, questions of access to productive resources for the purposes of social reproduction come to the fore. All this raises profound questions as to the nature of work, and the possibilities for social movements as catalysts of more equitable and resilient food systems. The extent to which various actors in the food system can be described as precarious is a subject that will be taken up as part of the discussion of the future of work in a post-Covid world.



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