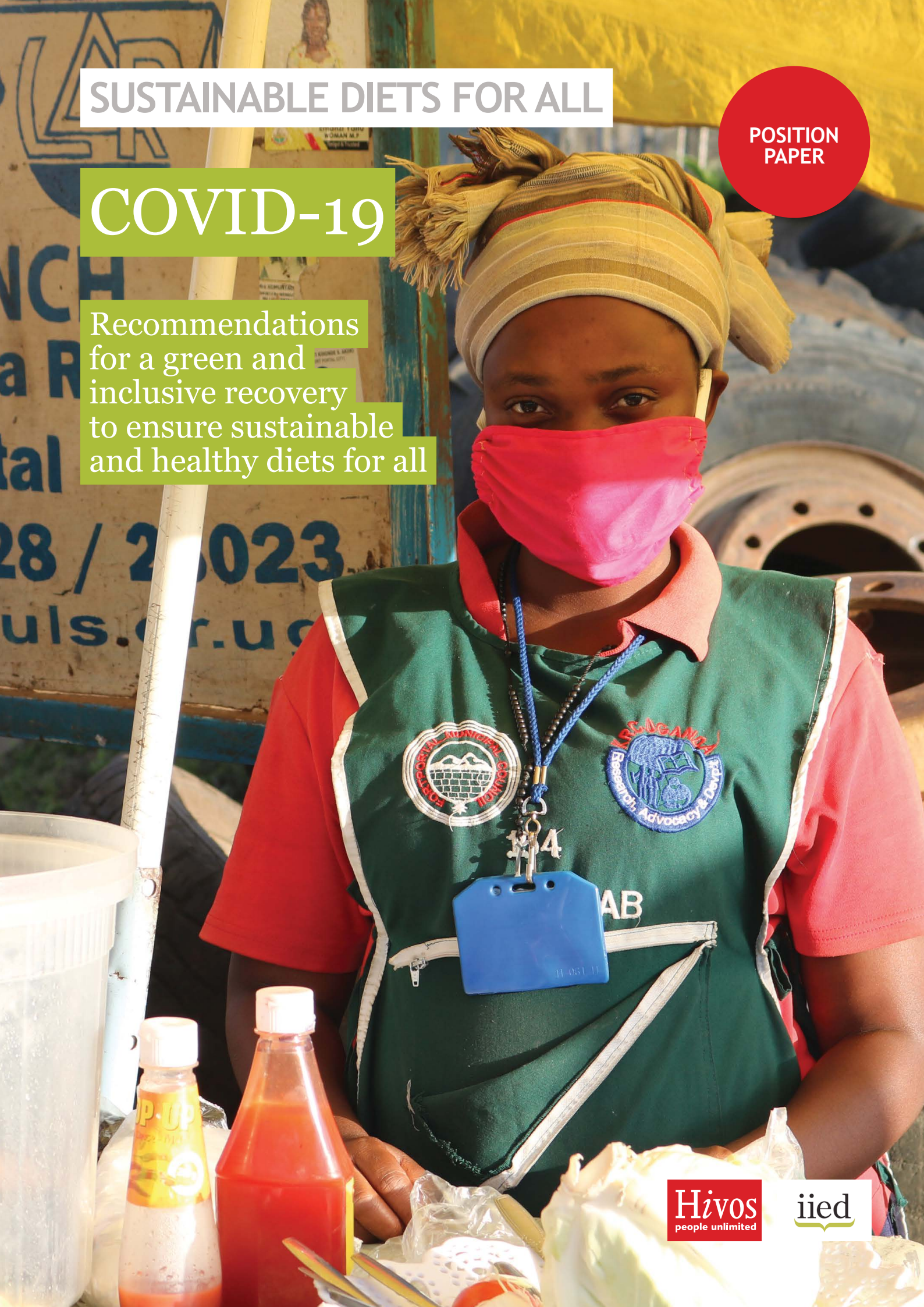


SUSTAINABLE DIETS FOR ALL

POSITION
PAPER

COVID-19

Recommendations
for a green and
inclusive recovery
to ensure sustainable
and healthy diets for all



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Since the start of 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has been wreaking havoc worldwide. Low- and middle-income countries have been especially hard hit by the economic impact of the pandemic, in addition to the direct public health effects of COVID-19. Not only are their healthcare and food (production and distribution) systems less robust, disrupted markets and travel restrictions have resulted in volatile food prices and rapidly rising food insecurity numbers. Smallholder farmers, informal food vendors, low-income consumers, ethnic minorities, women and other marginalised groups are particularly at risk. Without adequate immediate and long-term responses, the health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19 could [trigger and lapse into a global food security emergency](#). As the international community and LMIC governments prepare further recovery and economic stimulus responses, it is vital that these response measures are truly green and inclusive, and that they are focused on building greater resilience in the food system against external shocks.

The pandemic has clearly exposed flaws in our global food system, [demonstrating how vulnerable it is to unexpected shocks](#). It has also shown the interconnections between environmental degradation (deforestation, soil erosion and habitat destruction that is specifically related to food production) and the emergence of zoonosis. The globalised food system, with its focus on large-scale production of cash and commodity crops, is a [strong driver of this destruction](#). Furthermore, the major market and value chain disruptions caused by the pandemic are exacerbating existing inequalities, as marginalised groups are least resilient to these shocks and therefore impacted most.

This brief highlights examples of how civil society actors from within the Sustainable Diets for All (SD4All) programme have successfully mitigated the impact of the pandemic on low-income groups in the countries in which the programme operates. Examples include both CSO partners' direct crisis mitigation activities and strategies at a grassroots level, as well as direct policy engagement efforts. Based on the programme's experiences, the document formulates recommendations for policy and action for key actors. These recommendations focus on how green and inclusive economic recovery packages can support low-income groups in the food system in the short and medium term, as well as on how they can make the system itself more resilient to [external shocks like future pandemics and climate change](#).

1. Promoting sustainable and diverse food production

In many LMICs, lockdown measures such as the closing of markets, limitation of export and mobility and the closing of borders are leading to (immediate) local food shortages. With an agricultural labour force unable to transport food due to lockdown, farmers have seen their harvests go to waste, or otherwise not reach the market. At the same time, with the planting season having started in many countries, farmers need continued access to seeds and other inputs, and need to be able to mobilise labour. Most food products in regional market systems in LMICs are traded in peri-urban 'wet' informal markets. Food system actors such as smallholder farmers, but also food traders and vendors depend on these markets for their income/daily wages. The loss of income caused by disruptions to food trade, such as the closing of informal markets, is therefore among the main factors for rising food insecurity as well as poverty levels.

In the past few months, the SD4All programme's civil society partners have dealt with these issues in various ways. During the lockdown periods, civil society partners have continued to promote the availability and accessibility of sufficient and nutritious, diverse food for all people. Advocating for government policymakers and other stakeholders to promote, prioritise and support locally produced, diverse food as a key way to mitigate the COVID-19 (and subsequent food insecurity) crisis, has been a key focus in SD4All advocacy efforts. Some examples are highlighted below.

SD4All national policy-level partner [Food Rights Alliance \(FRA\)](#) assumed a seat in the Ugandan government's national COVID-19 task force. Here, they explicitly called for the inclusion of food diversity as a key element in government disaster risk management strategies. As a concrete next step, they called for the immediate provision of a diversity of foods beyond beans and posho (maize meal porridge, the national dish) to the Ugandan low-income population in need. They are now engaging parliamentarians and government decision makers in policy conversations on the key role of food diversity in building resilience to climate change and future pandemics.

In [Zambia](#), lockdown measures have been relatively light. Whereas measures like social distancing and increased hygiene practices have been introduced, meetings of up to 50 people have always been allowed. SD4All partner [Civil Society for Poverty Reduction \(CSPR\)](#) has for some years been advocating for the diversification of [Zambian](#)



In Zambia, partner CUTS initiated a campaign with the Lusaka City Council to inform visitors of informal markets about the pandemic, consumer protection and the right to food (© CUTS/Njavwa W. Simukoko)

agriculture, in particular to shift agricultural subsidies away from maize towards a broader range of more nutritious and diverse food crops. Anticipating the government’s economic recovery packages, they have launched a [report](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on the country’s food diversification agenda. The report emphasises the need for recovery and economic stimulus packages to be in line with the government’s existing food diversification strategy beyond the sole production of maize, and to be oriented towards building greater resilience in the food production system.

2. Promoting healthy and diverse food consumption

Promoting and increasing demand for more diverse foods is a crucial step in the process of shifting both agricultural practices and food systems policies towards resilience to external shocks such as climate change and pandemics. While linking diversity on the farm and on the plate has been a crucial part of this effort, the COVID-19 crisis has made already vulnerable populations more prone to job loss and extreme poverty. Most low-income urban households, many of whom work in the informal economy, live ‘hand to mouth’ on their daily earnings and don’t have enough savings to see them through the lockdown. Examples of how the SD4All

programme has been mitigating the pandemic’s impact on the consumption of healthy diets by low-income groups are the following:

In Bolivia, CSO partner MIGA decided to make their annual indigenous and healthy food fair TAMBO virtual. They designed an online training and information programme for consumers and other food system actors such as chefs, producers and business owners, including the provision of healthy recipes and other tips on how to eat healthily in times of crisis. Partner Cosecha Colectiva de les Ningunes organised a successful series of informative [videos and webinars](#) informing young people and low-income groups about ‘resilient food’: affordable food that’s also healthy and nutritious. They also facilitated a successful online course ‘Food as a social transformation tool’, to target young people in the food system in Bolivia.

In Indonesia, partner Tanoker’s efforts focused mainly on the village and community level, as they started a ‘family food resilience’ initiative in three subdistricts in East Java. This included the promotion of home gardening, and a collaboration with community-based small food enterprises to produce online healthy food preparation instruction



With online shopping on the rise as a result of the pandemic, partner ASPPUK in Indonesia is helping small-medium enterprise owners like Hajar Hasyim, who previously sold her local products at various markets and festivals, to build her online marketing capacity (© Hivos/Sena Aji)

videos for social media. Partner organisation **Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme (NFTP-EP)** organised a series of online webinars including but not limited to their project area in West Kalimantan, promoting the consumption of local and forgotten vegetables and foods in the Kapuas Hulu regency. They organised online capacity building activities such as cooking demos and a 'healthy local food' challenge with local youth groups. With online shopping on the rise as a result of the pandemic, the Association for Women in Small Business Assistance (ASPPUK) organised online capacity building on photography, videography and digital marketing tailored for their network organisations in four provinces. This helped to improve the online marketing capacity of the female SMEs they are currently working with while promoting local, healthy, fair and green food products from their respective regions.

In **Zambia**, partner **CSO Scaling Up Nutrition (CSOSUN)** engaged in discussions with the Ministry of Health's National Food and Nutrition Commission, addressing access to nutritious and diverse diets for all as a key element in COVID-19 mitigation efforts. They particularly stressed the importance of local food. The Minister responded by urging Zambians to pay attention to food diversity. Partner **Civil**

Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) engaged in policy discussions with the Ministries of Finance, of National Planning and Development, and of Community Development and Social Welfare, to implement social protection measures, and to secure sufficient funds to enable low-income groups' access to good, healthy and diverse diets.

3. Promoting the role of informal markets and informal market actors

Low-income groups in urban and peri-urban environments depend on local, informal markets, where food is brought in from rural areas. Small-scale producers as well as processors, traders and vendors also depend on, and play critical roles in local and regional food systems. SD4All has been advocating for recognition of the role informal markets and informal market actors, such as small and medium-sized food businesses and food vendors, play in providing food to low-income groups, contributing to food security. Informal food vendors, many of whom are women, have been further marginalised as a result of COVID-19 and actively excluded from aid packages. A few examples are mentioned below.

An SD4All study in **Zambia** found that [informal food markets play a crucial role in providing fresh food to urban](#)



“Pucarani” market in El Alto, Bolivia: ‘mobile markets’ offer vegetables and fruits to inhabitants of different low-income neighbourhoods where local markets have been closed (© Patricio Crooker via Fundación Alternativas)

[consumers](#), and in linking the urban poor with key local markets for fresh fruit, vegetables and meat. Informal food markets inherently include many different actors, and are rich in diversity of goods, qualities and quantities. Despite their central role, informal markets are commonly marginalised or ignored by public policy. Informal food markets are critical to ensure food provisioning for 90% of poor households in Zambian cities. When informal markets in Zambia were closed due to the COVID-19 crisis SD4All partner **Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS)**, with the Lusaka City Council, developed an information campaign to inform visitors of informal markets about the pandemic, consumer protection and the right to food. Partner **Alliance for Zambia Informal Economy Associations (AZIEA)** has called on the government to [implement social protection programmes](#) that can guarantee the health of both the economic and social livelihood of informal market actors. As the government is preparing the development of a COVID-19 recovery fund for small (formal and informal) businesses, additional research done by Hivos on the impact of COVID-19 on informal markets in Zambia has found that only a small portion (4%) of informal market actors were actually informed about the fund. Next steps on the

inclusion of these actors in the government’s response are being elaborated.

In **Uganda** in the Kabarole district, SD4All partner **Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC)** asked the government to recognise low-income food vendors who were pushed out of business as a target group to receive food aid, as they were facing immediate food insecurity. In a recently published report on informal markets, they called upon the government to not only [enable food vendors to recover from the economic impact](#) inflicted by the lockdown restrictions, but also to install more detailed long-term legal and regulatory frameworks that recognise street food vending as a legitimate and acceptable way of providing food.

In La Paz, **Bolivia**, partners **MIGA** and **Alternativas** are part of a municipal task force for food security during the pandemic that, amongst other things, has developed ‘mobile markets’: trucks that offer vegetables and fruits to inhabitants of different low-income neighbourhoods where local markets have been closed. They have contributed to the establishment of the initiative, emphasising the need for a diverse range of healthy foods to be provided.



Informal market actors working in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic (© CUTS/Njavwa W. Simukoko)

Recommendations

Safeguarding all people's access to, and use of nutritious, diverse and sustainably produced food should be a crucial element in COVID-19 mitigation and recovery strategies. Governments' short-term responses to the pandemic should focus on safeguarding food security of all people, ensuring no one is left behind. Longer-term economic stimulus recovery responses should be truly green and inclusive, and be directly oriented towards building greater resilience to systemic shocks such as pandemics and climate change. Special attention needs to be paid to include marginalised groups, for whom no work means no income, and no food.

Based on the experiences described in this brief, the SD4All programme has formulated a set of recommendations to governments and the international (donor) community to support those most at risk, including smallholder farmers, food vendors and informal SMEs, low-income consumers and other marginalised groups, in particular women. To reorient the food system towards greater equity and sustainability, it also formulates recommendations on how longer-term responses can contribute to building truly green and inclusive post-COVID-19 societies.

a) Strengthen resilience in food production systems by promoting (agro)biodiversity

- Recognise and include the production of diverse foods by smallholder farmers as a key service in short-term social protection packages of national governments and emergency responses of international donors.
- Invest in food diversity as a key and guiding principle in (re)shaping food systems.
- Allocate long-term economic recovery packages to stimulate sustainable agricultural practices: reform food and agricultural subsidies by shifting subsidies and incentives away from unsustainable intensive monoculture production to agro-ecological, regenerative, circular and low-carbon agricultural practices.

b) Prioritise local and regional market development

- In governments' short-term crisis responses, local/regional markets and short value chains should be recognised as critical (food) infrastructure to secure availability, and access to nutritious and diverse food products for all people.

- Economic recovery packages should prioritise the development and strengthening of local/regional value chains (regional food systems) as a means to improve food security, over the promotion of international commodity trade.
- Measures taken should support the marketing and consumption of locally/regionally produced food.
- Digital value chain and market innovations such as home-delivery services and direct producer-to-consumer networks should be supported.

c) Empower and include informal food system actors

- Include food vending and other informal food market activities as essential services in short-term social protection packages of national governments and emergency responses of international donors.
- Include SMEs and other informal food enterprises as key recipients of economic support and recovery funds during and after the pandemic.
- Develop and implement structural legal and regulatory frameworks on informal markets that acknowledge and institutionalise the important role of informal market actors in providing food to low-income groups.
- Develop gender-sensitive economic recovery measures such as a women's entrepreneurship fund, as a majority of informal food vendors and food system actors are women.

d) Support and empower low-income consumers

- Governments should prioritise information and awareness-raising campaigns with low-income consumer groups to contain the risk of the pandemic and to ensure access to information and accountability.
- Governments should promote and support home gardening, food co-operatives and other urban agriculture initiatives, to increase low-income urban consumers' food security.
- Where needed, food aid from governments should be diverse and nutritious and sourced locally or regionally whenever possible.

e) Make food governance processes more inclusive

- Governments (at all levels) should install and improve consultation and participation processes in developing both short- and long-term responses to the crisis. Particularly the voices of underrepresented and marginalised groups should be included in negotiation processes.
- International response packages to recipient governments should be based on civil society's participation in the process of (elaborating) national responses. The level of transparency and accountability of this process should also be considered.
- Invest in civil society: sustain CSOs to continue existing in the current context so they can actively participate in these processes and thereby ensure proper representation of the voices of especially under-represented/marginalised groups, and monitor governments' response and hold them to account.

f) Uphold and align recovery efforts with existing international agreements

- International responses should be in line with, and reinforce existing international agreements and guidelines, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Climate Agreement, and the upcoming CFS voluntary guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition.
- Support from the international community to recipient governments should directly contribute to the establishment of more inclusive and greener societies, based on the principles of regeneration and circularity, and should not reproduce or reinforce unsustainable fossil fuel-based practices (for example fertiliser subsidies), as referenced in SDG 12.c.1.

For further information, contact the Sustainable Diets for All Programme Manager (Hivos), Frank Mechielsen at fmechielsen@hivos.org, or Alejandro Guarin, Senior Researcher, Shaping Sustainable Markets Group (IIED), at alejandro.guarin@iied.org. Visit our website: www.sustainablediets4all.org

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Authors: Nout van der Vaart, with contributions from William Chilufya, Alejandro Guarin, Carol Gribnau, Steven Hawkes, Frank Mechielsen, Giulia Nicolini, Silvana Paath, Nicole Szucs, and Immaculate Yossa Daisy

Photo credit, front cover: Partner KRC in Uganda called upon the government to enable food vendors to recover from the economic impact inflicted by the lockdown restrictions (© Kabarole Research and Resource Centre)

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