

**WEST AFRICAN
WOMEN
FACING COVID**



**7 FACTS
SOLUTIONS**

4 WOMEN AND GIRLS FACE THE FOOD CRISIS

Women are historically at the front line in dealing with food crises in West Africa. They are not only in charge of feeding their families, but they also represent an important part of the farming labor force. When a crisis hit, women are the first ones to sacrifice themselves in order for the children and old people to eat first and they are the first ones to limit their food rations. Girls are often at a disadvantage to get food for the benefit of boys.

The COVID-19 crisis had an important impact for impoverished households living in rural areas in West African countries. According to the World Food Programme, the number of people experiencing food insecurity could almost double to reach 57,6 millions of people by the end of the year, compared to 36 millions before the pandemic. Children high malnutrition could

increase by 20% compared to the estimation made at the beginning of the year. The closure of borders and movement restrictions had a terrible impact for cattle's food and water supply. A lot of households said they had to resort to their crop stores leaving them empty before the dry season. The food prices' increase pushed women to get less nutritious food preventing them from getting a balanced diet. Food rations were reduced to one meal a day and a lot of households borrowed money from their neighbors, sold off their cattle or resorted to family solidarity to face income losses. Some clever solutions, such as replacing the soap by ashes, were adopted in order to survive. The closing of schools and the suspension of free school meals could have negative impacts on girls; some studies have shown that these free meal systems have a positive impact on gender equality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional governments need a plan to quickly tackle the food crisis which is threatening West Africa. Food distributions needs to be put in place to support the most vulnerable people and basic commodities should be subsidized. Governments should make sure to assist pastoralist women, often owner of small cattle, through the distribution of cattle feed. All these measures should enable women to participate and reinforce the market system. It is important to make sure that the implemented measures are targeting urban population as well as rural population and that information about existing measures be accessible to all. In the long term, it is urgent to secure women's access to land in order to sustainably guarantee food security, and to support family farming.

// The COVID-19 is causing a lot of trouble. Feeding my children in the morning has become difficult. We totally depend on milk sale and with the closing of markets, we cannot sell milk anymore. If we do not sell milk, we do not eat."

Kadidia Diallo, a milk producer in Burkina Faso

