

APRIL 2020 NEWSLETTER

NETWORK NEWS

It is with a heavy heart that we open this month's newsletter. We have all certainly gone through a lot and are still experiencing concern for our loved ones and ourselves; isolation and the challenges of working remotely and with doing simple shopping for bare necessities. Worried that we will find empty shelves, the sense of panic has grabbed us and made us stock up with more food than we usually do. And this has certainly exposed how fragile the food system we live in is. Everywhere we read that there is more than enough food for everyone; and yet, we have all been panicking. However, the threat can be real as manufacturing is struggling and deliveries are under a lot of pressure. Despite all this negativity though it is certainly a time for us to look ahead and learn from this situation to build stronger and more resilient food systems in harmony with the environment - which at least has had the chance to "breathe" with billions of vehicles, engines, and humans all at a standstill.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed brought parts of the world to a halt, it has also spurred a huge research effort amongst institutions and countries to assist with understanding and mitigating this challenge. The University of Cambridge is amongst those institutions [leading](#) the field in COVID-19 research, with the Cambridge Institute of Therapeutic Immunology and Infectious Disease (CITIID) and its collaborators dedicated to fighting the pandemic. More information on how the University is responding to the pandemic can be found [here](#).

Another topic of immediate concern for us is the significant food security challenge that has been raised by local and global efforts to halt the spread of this disease. While containment responses such as social distancing are vital to halt the spread of the disease, they also have the potential to introduce or worsen food distribution challenges. The UK for instance, has a fragile food supply chain system, a food retailing section dominated by a small number of companies, and an agricultural system that only supplies about 50% of the country's [needs](#). Disruptions to food production, harvesting, and local or international supply chains thus place the country at significant risk of food [insecurity](#). Household food insecurity has also increased, with reports of the increased [use](#) of food banks by the newly unemployed. Globally, the pandemic has also exacerbated food insecurity. Countries are [restricting](#) food exports, and food importing nations are at risk of decreased food supplies and higher food prices. In addition to disrupted food supply chains, social distancing measures have led to income losses in population groups that are the most vulnerable to sudden economic shocks. This is especially true in countries with large numbers of economically vulnerable people, and with governments that cannot

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mobilize sufficient economic resources, or that are otherwise unable or unwilling to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on their populations. For instance, in Brazil, some favela communities are [coordinating](#) their own local food distribution systems to curtail starvation, and African countries face significant [threats](#) to ensuring food security.

However, in the midst of these very serious challenges, we are heartened by the number of people, including our readers, who working towards their mitigation. If you are conducting work on COVID-19 related topics, especially those related to food security challenges, please let us know. We want to know what you are doing, and whether we can help you to promote your work, or connect you with others doing similar work.

Sadly, due to COVID-19 related funding postponements, we have had to delay our funding application to support our early career researchers on their field trips. But on a lighter note, we have published interviews from two of the researchers who won awards from the [2019 Early Career Researcher Travel Fund](#). Please find interviews by PhD students [Nick Fradgley](#) and [Dorien Braam](#). In addition, Dorien has switched her focus to exploring how to integrate COVID-19 responses into her work, and is currently researching how movement restrictions and lockdown are affecting Sindh's [in Pakistan] agriculture-dependent communities. We purposefully shaped these interviews to give other researchers intending to take field trips an idea of how Nick and Dorien planned their trips, conducted their research, and incorporated the knowledge they gained into their doctoral projects.

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A plant breeder at the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research and Nick Fradgley (right).



Dorien Braam (second from right) conducting interviews in Pakistan.

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We would like to remind you about some of the fabulous female researchers we profiled for International Women's Day on 8th March. We decided that they deserved the whole month, and thus we thank [PhD student Charlotte Milbank](#), [Dr Jean Adams](#), [Dr Nadia Radzman](#), [Dr Gitanjali Yadav](#) and [Dr Shailaja Fennell](#) for their participation in this project. We felt that would be informative to find out more about successful female researchers' study and career narratives, so we structured the interviews specifically to allow the researchers to tell us their multi-faceted study and career narratives, to let us know who or what was so influential in their journeys, and to inform us on how their work interfaces with food security. Please help us by spreading these links, especially to those needing to see more representations of women in science. Please see images provided by Charlotte and Gitanjali below.



And finally, we would like to give a warm thank you to IRC member **Inanna Hamati-Ataya**, who has been ably leading the '[Objects](#)' Project. This project began in 2018, and is a collaboration between Cambridge Global Food Security and the [Centre for Global Knowledge Studies](#). It assembles multiple small groups of researchers representing the natural, physical, and social sciences as well as the humanities, to discuss objects relating to global food security. The current round of events and discussions have been completed, and we hope to secure more funding to continue in the future. Please find recordings of the discussions [here](#) and more information on the project [here](#).

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Dr Helen Ann Curry, Dr Alison Bentley, and Professor Martin Johnson discussing wheat at the Objects: Carriers of Knowledge event at the 2019 Cambridge Festival of Science.

LISTINGS**EXTERNAL EVENTS**

28 April. [Webinar: The future of food - beyond the hype.](#) **Forum for the Future.**

29 April. [Webinar: Keeping a Sunny Outlook – De-risking Agriculture Through Weather-Tech.](#) **Agri-TechE.**

14 May. [Webinar: From Farmer to Pharma – a Teaser of Things to Come.](#) **Agri-TechE.**

PUBLICATIONS AND MEDIA

[Contact us](#) if you are an IRC member and would like support in promoting your new publication.

[Strengthening participation of poultry farmers in the fight against antimicrobial resistance: A public engagement program.](#) IRC member **Chioma Achi's** description of the public engagement program she organised together with poultry farmers in Kaduna, Nigeria, as part of her doctoral research.

[What does lockdown mean for the future of our food supply?](#) An article by IRC member **Jagjit Srai** on how COVID-19 related lockdown strategies affect food supply chain systems.

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[Local food solutions during the coronavirus crisis could have lasting benefits.](#) An article by IRC member **Shailaja Fennell** on how local communities can adapt to the food security challenges posed by COVID-19.

[Missives from MillNETi: Interdisciplinary working to tackle iron deficiency.](#) By IRC member **Joanna Wolstenholme**.

[Poor people experience greater financial hardship in areas where income inequality is greatest.](#) Co-authored by IRC member **Jaideep Prabhu**.

[Wine glass size may influence how much you drink in restaurants.](#) How wine glass size can influence the amount of wine drunk. Referencing a study involving IRC members **Theresa Marteau** and **Gareth Hollands**.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

If you are a University of Cambridge researcher interested in putting together an interdisciplinary application and would like assistance in finding suitable collaborators/coordinating a group meeting, please [contact us](#).

[Public Engagement Starter Fund.](#) University of Cambridge researchers can apply for small grants for research-based public engagement activities. **Application deadline: 15 May.**

[Postdoc Business Plan Competition.](#) For University of Cambridge affiliated postdocs. **Application deadline: 12 July.**

[Get funding for ideas that address COVID-19.](#) Proposals invited for short-term projects addressing and mitigating the health, social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. **Application deadline: None.**

[Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund COVID-19 Emergency Awards.](#) A rolling emergency funding scheme to make awards to Cambridge and African researchers working together to address COVI-19 in Africa. **Application deadline: Not stated.**