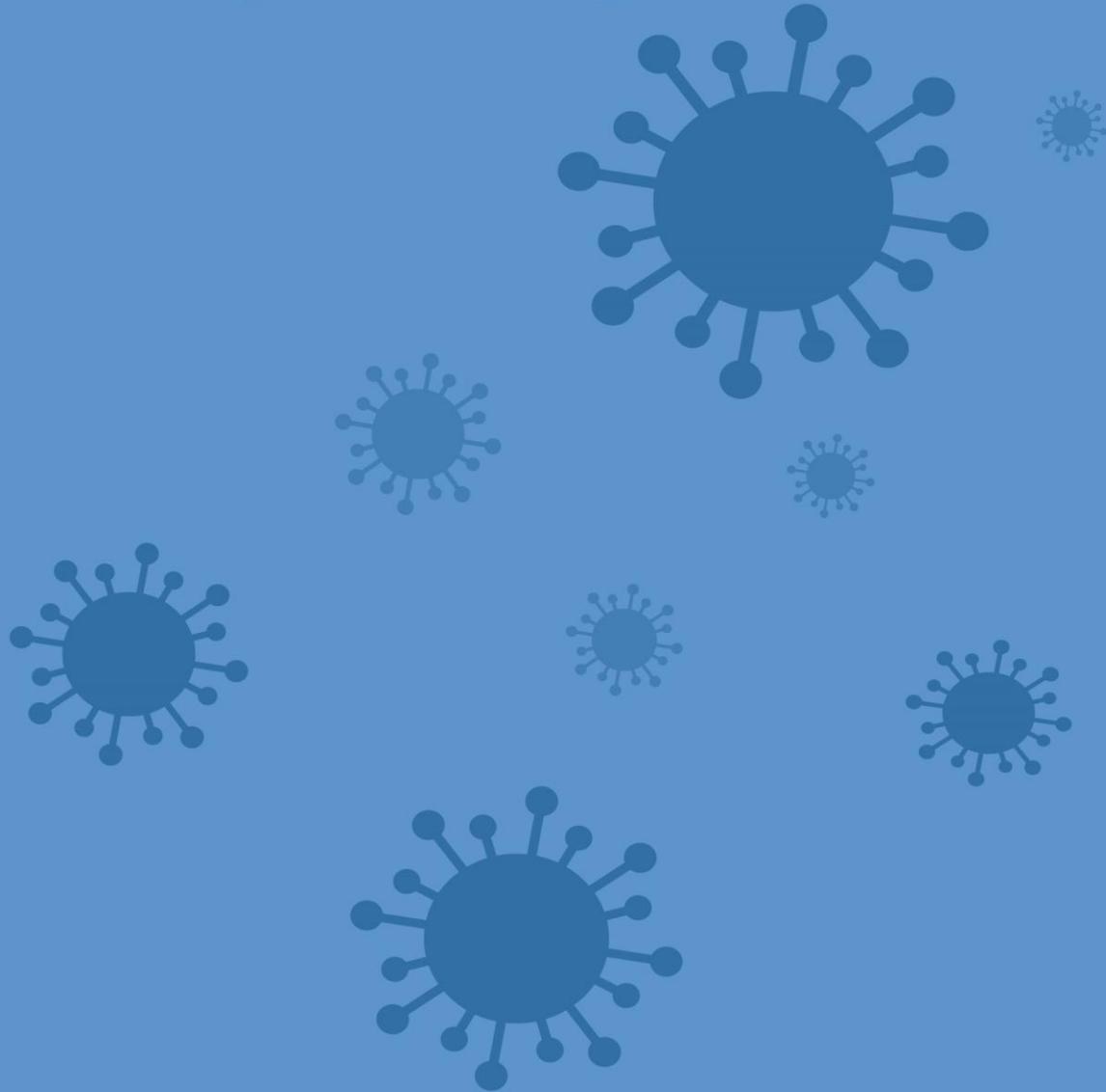




Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Adding a gender lens into FAO's response to COVID-19 – Programme guidance



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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis; it is affecting individuals, societies and economies at their core (United Nations, 2020a). The virus is spreading at a fast pace in the Near East and North Africa region, affecting everyone. Just as the direct and indirect impacts differ from country to country, they also vary from one individual to another. Gender, together with other factors including age, ethnicity, geographical location, nationality, disability and education, may further compound individual experiences during the crisis. Thus, it is extremely important to recognize the extent to which the pandemic affects different women and men differently and design and implement appropriate measures.

Since the virus outbreak, existing social biases and gender-based discrimination against women and girls in the public and private spheres have been exacerbated. With the imposed social isolation and heightened social and economic pressures, women and girls' vulnerability to domestic violence, currently experienced by 37 percent of women in Arab countries, is projected to increase (UN ESCWA and UN Women, 2020), while existing recourses and protection mechanisms, especially in rural areas, are absent or not able to absorb the surge in cases (FAO, 2020a). With the movement restrictions and suspension of schools, unpaid care work burden has also significantly increased, impacting women's health and putting them at higher risk of infection (CARE, 2020).

As the crisis deepens, the economic impacts are felt especially by women and girls who are generally earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs or living close to poverty (United Nations, 2020b). The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to result in the loss of 1.7 million jobs in the Arab region, with a majority in sectors dominated by women (UN ESCWA and UN Women, 2020). Economic shocks will also have ripple effects on girls, especially in rural areas, who are pulled out of schools to help at home or married off early to relieve the family of another child to feed (Arnold, Anderson, Rao and Gammage, 2020).

The impacts on food systems and food security and nutrition are also gendered. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the supply and demand of food and reduced the purchasing power of rural households and the capacity, especially of women farmers, to produce and market their goods (CFS, 2020). Individuals affected by conflict and instability, which comprise more than 28 million people in the region, may fall further into food insecurity (FAO, 2020b). Discriminatory gender norms, which often prioritize men and boys, can put women and girls, particularly in rural areas, at higher risk of food insecurity and malnutrition. Furthermore, rural women and girls are likely to be disproportionately affected both in their productive roles – as producers, processors and traders – and in their reproductive roles and care functions, due to their time poverty and limited access to productive resources, services and information. Hence, not only is the pandemic likely to worsen existing gender and social inequalities, but also to undermine future restoration efforts and food systems altogether.

What must FAO do to ensure gender is integrated in the programme response?

In line with the pledge to Leave No One Behind and with the goal and objectives of the FAO Gender Equality Policy, all COVID-19 response efforts must be inclusive, equitable and gender-responsive. To support Country Offices and technical groups in their efforts, this note aims to provide programmatic guidance on integrating a gender lens into COVID-19 response, answering the main **what** and the **how** questions. In addition, the note highlights **key areas and actions** that could be considered in FAO's efforts

to strengthen the resilience of farming households and communities and promote sustainable, resilient and gender-responsive food systems.

1- WHAT: Gender data and gender analysis

All programme responses must be informed by vulnerability assessments with data disaggregated by sex, age, disability, and geographical location and by gender analysis to take stock of and take into account the gender-differentiated impacts of the pandemic on diverse individuals, including with respect to time use, social and economic opportunities and vulnerabilities, care burden, food security and malnutrition, and exposure to the risks of violence, sexual abuse and exploitation.

HOW:

In the emergency response:

- **Conduct rapid assessments.** As the situation is rapidly changing, programmes need to be continuously informed and updated by rapid vulnerability assessments that include **gender analysis** of women's and men's (of different ages, abilities and geographical locations) changing roles, responsibilities, vulnerabilities, capacities, and access to resources and services as a result of the pandemic and its containment measures.
- **Regularly assess potential barriers, including physical, social and informational barriers** to accessing services and benefiting from programme interventions, particularly for rural women and girls, elderly people, people with disabilities, refugees, migrants, internally displaced populations (IDPs) and other at-risk groups.
- **Ensure that programme responses have support in the form of technical gender expertise** in the conducting of rapid gender analysis and integration of gender into COVID-19 preparedness, response and mitigation measures.

In the medium- and long-term planning:

- **Position FAO as a main actor in providing rapid and accurate gender-responsive information and data,** and support governments in systematically **collecting, analysing and using data disaggregated by sex, age, disability and geography (rural/urban)** to ensure that national policies, post-COVID-19 recovery, and resilience building plans are well informed by the different needs and priorities of the diverse groups.
- **Devote resources toward researching the gendered implications** of the pandemic in the long-term, including the socio-economic impacts and intra-household dynamics.

2- WHAT: Consult and engage the affected population

All **information and data gathering efforts**, from needs assessments to monitoring and evaluation, as well as programme design and implementation, **should include consultations with the affected population** and in particular **dedicated consultations with women and girls** and their formal and informal groups and organizations, including rural women community leaders and traditional female health workers, on the interventions that are needed, accessible, safe and culturally appropriate.

HOW:

In the emergency response and medium- and long-term planning:

- Ensure **inclusion and consultation of local women's organizations** during the design and implementation of the programme responses, as they can be a good source of information when in-person gatherings and face-to-face consultation with beneficiaries are not possible.
- Support **women's ownership of and leadership roles** in the response plans and designed interventions by positioning them at the heart of the response teams and of efforts to ensure that both men's and women's needs during and after the epidemic are adequately met.

3- WHAT: Do-no-harm

All **interventions and steps of the programme cycle**, from needs assessments to response plans, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, should proactively adopt **a do-no-harm approach** and prioritize the mitigation, response, and prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) in rural areas and sectors.

HOW:

In the emergency response:

- Ensure that **preparedness and response plans and programmes are grounded in strong protection and risk analysis**, with sex-disaggregated data to identify, address, appraise and manage the different risks facing diverse groups of women, men, girls and boys, taking into account social and gender norms and power asymmetries. It is especially important to protect those at risk of GBV among groups such as refugees, IDPs, migrants and those at hard-to-reach places.
- Raise awareness and build the capacity of affected populations and local partners on how to identify, respond to and address existing and expected protection risks, including GBV, and guide them through adequate reporting and referral mechanisms.
- Ensure that **containment and mitigation measures address the burden of unpaid care work** and its associated heightened risks of GBV and physical and psychological abuse.
- Ensure that **safe and gender-sensitive complaint and feedback mechanisms** are functioning and accessible to different groups in rural areas.

4- WHAT: Integrate a gender lens into programme formulation and implementation

In all programme responses, pay attention to existing gender differences and how they are likely to shape different people's perceived impacts, needs, roles and opportunities, in order to establish specific measures and provide tailored gender-responsive approaches that mitigate the impacts on the more at-risk groups in the short-term and ensure safe restoration efforts and build for gender-transformative change in the medium- and long-term.

HOW:

In the emergency response:

- Prioritize programmes targeted at more at-risk groups, including, for example, rural women and girls, women heads of households, informal, part-time, seasonal and migrant workers, elderly people, people living with disabilities, refugees, migrants and IDPs through electronic cash assistance and vouchers and livelihood programmes. When using technology in transferring assistance, address gender- and geographical-related barriers to accessing electronic transfers.
- Scale up gender-responsive and shock-responsive social protection measures that alleviate poverty, reduce risks, and protect at-risk groups and those who have lost their productive livelihoods, pensions, remittances and paid jobs, including daily wage workers, migrant workers, people living with disabilities, elderly people, women heads of households, and children and families who depend on school feeding.
- Support smallholder producers, women and men, through financial services, long-term and short-term loans, and innovative mechanisms that support access to markets, inputs and credit. Such efforts could prioritize rural women's economic activities as producers, processors, traders and entrepreneurs.
- Design programmes that aim to increase women's and men's economic resilience and reduce their vulnerabilities to price fluctuations and loss of income. These programmes could include, for example, enhancing equitable access to productive resources, including inputs (seeds, fertilizers, animal feed), and services to support rural women and men to recover and prepare for production in the following season/s.
- Use information and communications technology (ICT)-based capacity building through web platforms and mobile applications to provide trainings and convey vital information to women and men smallholder farmers in isolated rural areas, while addressing existing gender gaps in access to technology and information. This includes providing virtual and mobile-based training related to economic recovery, digital marketing and digital financial literacy for women to engage in financial transactions without having to travel outside of their communities, adding to their work burdens. Options to reach women in isolated areas could include, for example, voice messages sent via mobile phone with short learning messages to boost their productivity.

- **Maintain programme flexibility** in targeting individuals to continuously include rural women and men who have been severely affected by the social and economic impacts of the pandemic. Relax conditionalities of assistance programmes to facilitate access that might be more difficult due to increased unpaid care responsibilities and limited/restricted mobility.
- **Ensure that FAO's responses recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work** between women and men and facilitate women's increased participation in productive work. Options could include, for example, adding gender equality awareness sessions to the farmer field school training contents.

In the medium- and long-term planning:

- **Design and put in place long-term interventions that support men and women farmers** by enhancing their capacities through training programmes, strengthening their resilience to future shocks, and supporting their access to and control over productive resources (such as land, water, technology, extension), inputs (seeds, fertilizers, animal feed) and rural services (finance and access to markets).
- **Provide financial and technical support to producer organizations and cooperatives** to enable them to support rural women and men farmers to overcome constraints in production of food and market access in order to enhance sustainable food processing, storage and marketing capacities.
- **Advance agricultural modernization, digitalization and transformation.** Digitalization and innovation can be used to facilitate access to input and output markets and to financial support. This could include, for example, mechanisms to support women's participation in the digital economy and online and mobile markets to overcome market challenges imposed by restrictions on mobility and to build stronger and more resilient farming communities.
- **Support governments and public and private actors in integrating gender equality into recovery strategies** and resilience plans to foster a functional food system that provides access to safe, affordable and nutritious food to diverse populations in rural and urban settings. FAO can provide technical assistance and capacity development to public and private food system actors to address emerging problems resulting from COVID-19. Efforts could include, for example, training and technical support for women-led organizations and producers to strengthen their capacities for working in uncertain economic environments.
- **Support governments in integrating gender into existing social protection schemes** or in designing new ones to respond to the particular needs of rural women and men, especially those engaged in agriculture, fisheries or forestry. This can be done by increasing the reach of social protection systems by registering new people through rural organizations, developing electronic payments or using input vouchers.

5- WHAT: Allocate human and financial resources

In all programme responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, adequate resources should be allocated for gender mainstreaming and women-focused interventions, including ensuring human resources with gender expertise.

HOW:

[In the emergency response:](#)

- Ensure that a financial target for integration of gender into all emergency response plans and programmes is set and met.
- Support the inclusion of gender expertise among frontline responders and include both women and men in all response teams and efforts.

[In the medium- and long-term planning:](#)

- Ensure that gender is included in future resource mobilization strategies. All relevant future programmes should have adequate resources allocated for gender-transformative interventions.
- Raise gender technical capacities and create a pool of gender expertise within FAO's programme staff and partners' staff to support gender mainstreaming in all FAO programmes.

6- WHAT: Coordinate

In all programme responses, ensure coordination and partnership with international, national and local civil society organizations (CSOs), international and national nongovernmental organizations (I/NGOs) and women-led organizations and associations to maximize the reach and impacts of the programme efforts and enhance the focus on gender equality in the COVID-19 response.

HOW:

[In the emergency response:](#)

- Ensure institutional coordination and consultation with all food system actors while implementing measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 and responding to its impacts.
- Engage with the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and other humanitarian and development partners, including from national and international organizations, the private sector, and local women's organizations to ensure an inclusive and coordinated approach that can identify bottlenecks and respond to needs in a timely way.

In the medium- and long-term planning

- Coordinate with national and international actors and UN partner organizations to maximize programme efforts, joint resource mobilization and planning to contribute to regular, systematic sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data collection and analysis, focusing on rural women's and men's resilience and livelihood building.
- Set up information-sharing hubs at the country level with the UNCT and all relevant national, international and local organizations to facilitate sharing data, information and lessons learned from the COVID-19 response to support evidence-based future emergency responses and minimize future risks.

7- WHAT: Communicate and advocate

In all messaging and information sharing, factor in gender-, age- and location-based differences in literacy levels and access to information tools such as mobile phones and internet. Ensure that communication is inclusive and transmitted through multiple and innovative media options, including radio, visual guides, and community mobilization, as well as in a diversity of languages, in accessible formats and with use of accessible technologies.

HOW:

In the emergency response:

- Use different communication and information sharing channels that are trusted by different groups of women and men, such as rural women and men community leaders, religious leaders, traditional female health workers, school teachers, and women's and men's self-help groups.
- Design communication programmes covering critical issues related to the pandemic, such as hygiene, food safety, nutrition and healthy diets, supporting girls' and boys' education, and combatting GBV.

In the medium- and long-term planning:

- Engage men, including traditional and religious leaders, in communication and advocacy efforts that challenge negative gender norms and unequal power relations that lead to GBV at the household level. Ensure that these communications include messages advocating for the equal sharing of care work responsibilities between women and men (and girls and boys) inside households.
- Design communications and advocacy campaigns in rural areas that combat early marriage and child labour and support children, especially rural girls, to get back to school after removing of mobility restrictions.
- Promote women, in their households and communities, as role models, conveyors of informed messages and key agents of behavioural change needed to deal with the pandemic and its impacts.

8- WHAT: Monitor, adapt and report

All monitoring frameworks and processes must be gender-responsive in order to detect existing differences in the abilities of diverse individuals to access and benefit from the response programmes, or not. Monitoring frameworks and tools should also **assess and analyse any unintended negative and positive impacts** on the lives of rural women and men (of different ages and abilities) in order to inform programme adjustments to prevent unintended negative effects that can increase people's vulnerabilities, create injustices or exacerbate gender inequalities.

HOW:

In the emergency response and medium- and long-term planning:

- Add **gender-focused indicators** to monitor and assess, for example, the different changes that happened in the lives of women and men as a result of the response plans, including in terms of unpaid care work, employment, access to food, water and resources, socio-economic empowerment, etc.
- Ensure that **reporting of data and information** collected through monitoring exercises is **gender-sensitive** and presents a systematic analysis of the different socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 containment measures and programme responses upon different individuals.

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