



Boosting smallholder resilience for recovery Protecting the most vulnerable, promoting economic recovery and enhancing risk management capacities

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The issue

The COVID-19 pandemic is having devastating short- and long-term impacts on the lives and livelihoods of people in rural, peri-urban and urban settings. Apart from the pandemic's toll on human health and everyday life, containment measures, particularly the restricted movement of people and goods, are resulting in a dramatic increase in poverty, destroying livelihoods and increasing food insecurity.

Produced prior to the pandemic, the latest Global Report on Food Crises¹ indicated an increase in the number of people experiencing acute food insecurity in 2019 to 135 million in 55 countries. It is estimated that the global COVID-19 pandemic could push an additional 71 million people into extreme poverty in 2020, leading for the first time since 1998 to an increase in the share of the world's population living on less than USD 1.90 per day². The pandemic has aggravated existing gender inequalities in terms of reducing access to basic services, increasing domestic and work responsibilities, escalating gender-based violence and the loss of working opportunities in the informal sector³ (women make up 43 percent of the agricultural labour force, on average). United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres noted in his April 2020 Policy Brief that “across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex⁴”. The pandemic challenges efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of ending poverty and hunger and gender equality by 2030.

The full-scale effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated containment measures are unfolding as the virus spreads across territories. It is eroding the livelihoods and resilience of vulnerable groups, including small-scale farmers, herders, fishers and forest-dependent communities and food workers in both rural and urban areas. The effects of COVID-19 on vulnerable smallholders are numerous, cascading and exacerbating the effects of existing crises, particularly in areas seeing conflict, climate extremes, economic instability and/or food chain catastrophes, such as the desert locust infestation.

The effects of COVID-19 will be protracted, as the pandemic is unlikely to end in the near future and containment measures may be eased or reintroduced depending on the progression of the virus around the world. The erosion of livelihoods due to the impact of COVID-19 on health, incomes and purchasing power, as well as on agricultural production, processing, distribution and consumption, will require concerted recovery efforts. These need to be geared towards enabling countries and communities to recover and become more resilient to such pandemics, as well as to the climate and environmental crisis and multiple other colliding conflicts and risks. This public health crisis is highlighting the critical need to increase the resilience of rural and urban

Budget

USD 500 million

Time frame

2020–2024 (four years)

SDGs



Related FAO policy notes on COVID-19

- ▶ Anticipating the impacts of COVID-19 in humanitarian and food crisis contexts
- ▶ Social Protection and COVID-19 response in rural areas
- ▶ Addressing inequality in times of COVID-19
- ▶ FAO's Programme Clinic: Designing conflict-sensitive interventions
- ▶ Extension and advisory services: at the frontline of the response to COVID-19 to ensure food security
- ▶ How is COVID-19 affecting the fisheries and aquaculture food systems
- ▶ COVID-19 and smallholder producers' access to markets
- ▶ Mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 on the livestock sector
- ▶ Sustainable crop production and COVID-19
- ▶ Safeguarding smallholders production across regions: policies and actions to address the COVID-19 crisis

¹ <http://www.fightfoodcrises.net/food-crises-and-covid-19/en/>

² World Bank, 2020. Global Economic Prospects. Washington DC: World Bank. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects>.

³ ILO 2018. Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture. International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2018

⁴ UN Women (2020) Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. New York.



agricultural livelihoods and food systems against multiple interconnected and mutually aggravating risks, especially in Least Developed Countries (LDC), in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and in protracted crisis situations.

The magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 has reinforced the need for global collaboration in terms of managing risks and crises, anticipating threats, prevention and coordinating responses for resilience building ahead of future crises. It has revealed how communities, even in wealthier countries, are extremely vulnerable to such crises and has underlined the need for a recovery effort that focuses on building back better through a transition to more inclusive, resilient and sustainable economies and societies ahead of future pandemics, climate change and other threats. Advancing integrated, multirisk management measures is essential to boosting resilience across all systems, especially agriculture and food systems, to ensure that there is enough nutritious food and to safeguard the well-being of present and future generations.

The action

Smallholders⁵ are the engine of our food supply and entire food systems. They also have a number of functions, as investors in the agricultural sectors generating business and employment opportunities for the economy, and as custodians of natural resources and ecosystem services. The COVID-19 pandemic is creating significant hardship for smallholders, substantially affecting their health, access to markets for products, inputs for production and seasonal workers for harvest and processing. This situation is compounded by limited resources and low income, as well as other ongoing disasters, crises and conflicts. In all regions, the crisis is also highlighting the underlying structural constraints, such as the lack of infrastructure, facilities and services, including finance, that are essential for their full participation.

Resilience building entails prevention, anticipation and impact mitigation, adaptation and preparedness in shock prone and protracted crisis situations, including epidemics. It creates effective linkages between short-, medium- and long-term needs and risk-informed interventions that address also root causes of risk and vulnerabilities. Resilience building drives FAO's short-term response, while simultaneously addressing the longer-term effects of COVID-19 and other structural drivers that affect and threaten livelihoods and food security. This resilience programme builds on and complements FAO's emergency interventions under the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-led Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, as well as the FAO COVID-19 Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Ease Poverty programme and the FAO COVID-19 Transforming Food Systems programme.

FAO's response draws on the Organization's vast technical expertise and experience of implementing resilience programming over the last decade, bringing together the actors of humanitarian development and peace-sustaining partners to support agriculture, food security and nutrition, both in countries and in global policy and normative work. Helping smallholders to recover from COVID-19 and concurrent shocks, and enabling them to build their resilience to future threats requires transformative, need-based and demand-driven solutions. These include safe (reducing disease transmission), clean (low-carbon), green (nature- or ecosystems-based), equitable (socially inclusive and gender-sensitive), local, resource-efficient (water, energy, etc.), resilient (disaster, crisis and conflict-risk driven or sensitive), innovative and digital solutions along the entire food value chains.

To support smallholders, the 2020–2024 resilience programme incorporates a suite of complementary COVID-19-sensitive and specific interventions for the social, economic, environmental and governance dimensions of sustainable development:

► Safeguarding the most vulnerable in rural and urban settings through:

- 1 Shock-responsive and risk- and gender- sensitive social protection schemes;
- 2 Food assistance/distribution of cash transfer and inputs to the most vulnerable;
- 3 School feeding programmes;
- 4 Cash+, combining cash transfer and technical support, for productive capacity and household nutrition for the most vulnerable;
- 5 Labour market interventions such as public work schemes (for example, cash for work for maintaining/rehabilitating agriculture and food related public infrastructure, such as irrigation canals, feeder roads, etc.);
- 6 Insurance, microfinance and credit schemes;
- 7 Access to liquidity and finance for groups at risk;
- 8 *Caisse de Résilience* approach combining technical, social and micro-credit support.

⁵ Smallholders are small-scale family farmers, pastoralists, forest keepers, fishers who manage areas varying from less than one hectare to ten hectares. http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/nr/sustainability_pathways/docs/Factsheet_SMALLHOLDERS.pdf.



► **Promoting transformative economic recovery through:**

- 1 Agriculture and food production including crop, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture, forestry, etc.
 - Family/backyard/home gardening
 - Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (farm, community, business production);
- 2 Food processing and storage (including post-harvest management);
- 3 Food supply and distribution;
- 4 Marketing of food products;
- 5 Food consumption and healthy diets;
- 6 Food loss and waste (all along the food value chain);
- 7 Nature-based solutions including through the conservation and sustainable management of agro-sylvo-pastoral and natural ecosystems and natural resource management.

► **Building capacities and institutions for resilience through:**

- 1 Local and gender-sensitive capacity building on measures and communication for health risk management and community engagement to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission along the food value chain (e.g. via Dimitra clubs);
- 2 Enabling environment for the management of systemic multiple hazard risks (linking epidemics, climate, disaster, conflict and food chain threats), including through strengthening disaster and climate risk governance mechanisms;
- 3 Multirisk monitoring, in particular strengthening early warning systems relating to livelihoods and food security to inform prevention, preparedness and anticipatory actions, emergency, recovery and development;
- 4 Peaceful and equitable access to and governance of natural resources (land, forest, water, etc.);
- 5 One Health approach, combining human health, ecosystem health, plant health and animal health;
- 6 Emergency preparedness and anticipatory actions, including by preparing ahead for critical seasonal support and putting early warnings systems into action;
- 7 Innovation and digital services for social protection and economic recovery along the agriculture and food value chain;
- 8 Coordination of transhumance and trade movement across regional borders;
- 9 Public financial sector support to agrifood value chains;
- 10 Territorial food system approach along the rural-urban areas.

Expected results

This programme to boost smallholder resilience focuses on three dimensions: (1) social protection, (2) transformative climate-compatible economic recovery and (3) multirisk governance of the food system. These social, economic, environmental and governance results the food system, which includes agricultural production (crop, livestock, fish and forest products), post-harvest processing and storage, supply and distribution, marketing, consumption and nutrition and food loss and waste (along the whole food value chain) across rural and urban areas. The key expected results include:

- 1 **The most vulnerable are safeguarded in rural and urban settings**





- ▶ The most vulnerable people with agriculture and food-based livelihoods recover from the effects of COVID-19 and are more resilient to future crises, through extended access to risk-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection.
 - ▶ Small farmers have improved access to finance, supporting their cash flow and helping maintain productive capacity, incomes and access to markets. In the medium to long term, farming systems and practices will become more inclusive, resilient and sustainable through the smart use of concessional loans, public guarantees, insurance and other cash transfer mechanisms.
 - ▶ Women's health and rights are safeguarded and their voices heard, considering their predominant role in the informal sector.
- 2 Transformative economic recovery is supported**
- ▶ Smallholders and communities adopt context specific epidemic, conflict, climate and nature-friendly practices, as well as disaster risk reduction good practices, at both farm and community levels, boosting resilient food systems and food and nutrition security.
 - ▶ Smallholders have improved access to local and urban markets and consumers (including food distribution schemes), as well as access to finance, digital services and storage and processing capacity for fresh foods, leading to livelihood diversification opportunities.
 - ▶ Risk-informed local food value chains are enhanced and protocols established to ensure their functioning in case of an upsurge in COVID-19 cases or other threats.
- 3 Capacities and institutions are enhanced to build resilience**
- ▶ Governments benefit from strengthened multirisk governance and institutions, integrating the management of food chain threats (including COVID-19), climate and disaster risks, conflict and socio-economic crises across their agriculture and food systems.
 - ▶ Enhanced multirisk monitoring, analysis and early warnings are in place to drive COVID-19-sensitive prevention, preparedness, anticipatory actions, emergency interventions and risk-informed recovery and development that promotes green, resilient and sustainable growth.
 - ▶ The COVID-19-specific emergency preparedness and anticipatory actions are supported and implemented, including as part and in continuation of FAO's efforts under the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19.
 - ▶ Smallholders affected by COVID-19 improve and have more stable access to finance.

Partnerships

Post-pandemic recovery and resilience building efforts will require close partnerships, particularly at the local level, with a range of public, private and community actors and farmer and food producer organizations, to design and implement joined-up programmes, tailored to supporting specific national development priorities and boosting local agriculture and food based livelihoods and food systems. The Rome-based agencies' partnership for resilience and the Global Network Against Food Crises, as well as the tripartite FAO, World Health Organization and World Organisation for Animal Health's One Health Approach, are critical coordination mechanisms for the programme.

Programme links

As part of FAO's comprehensive COVID-19 response, the resilience programme builds on FAO's component of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, and is closely aligned with national priorities, plans and investments. It contributes to FAO's Hand-in-Hand initiative, as well as FAO's South-South and Triangular Cooperation Programme. It is fully anchored in the Global Network Against Food Crises, ongoing programmes in food-crisis contexts and the tripartite's One Health approach. FAO's resilience programme is also complementary to the FAO COVID-19 response in terms of economic inclusion and social protection to ease poverty, as well as the food system transformation programmes.



Regional and country focus

The regional contexts described here are subject to change in line with the results of ongoing country assessments and dialogues with Governments and partner organizations. The countries listed may therefore change.

The programme focuses on food crisis and high-risk countries, LDCs and SIDS, where COVID-19 is threatening the food system and the populations with agriculture and food-based livelihoods are vulnerable to or already affected by the pandemic and other crisis and risks. The programme will pay particular attention to subsistence and small-scale producers; SMEs; agricultural and food labourers including landless farmers and labourers along the rural-urban food value chain; pastoralists; vulnerable fishers and fishing communities; forest-dependent communities; indigenous groups; displaced populations and other marginal groups. The programme's interventions in Global Humanitarian Response Plan countries will focus on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus.

Closely aligned with national COVID-19 recovery policies and development priorities and plans, the programme will prioritize protection of the most vulnerable, helping them to continue agriculture production and access to food with cash+ agriculture inputs and increasing access to social protection. The programme will promote inclusive COVID-19 economic recovery through green infrastructure development and restoration of ecosystems that provide labour, income opportunities and ecosystem services for the most vulnerable populations. The COVID-19 pandemic impacts sustainable management of natural resources economy recovery, restoration of ecosystems, further revealing smallholder farmers' vulnerability of current agri-food systems in the region, reinforcing the need to continue supporting smallholder farmers' access to market and participation in value chains. The pandemic also reiterated the extreme high exposure to multiple risks (of climate change, food chain crisis and health) in the region. The programme will thus focus on strengthening risk management capacities of institutions and communities to boost proactive risk reduction and management and resilience building of agriculture and dependent livelihoods. Data collection and analyses are being rolled out and are constantly informing scenario planning, and programming of actions to avert and address emerging acute food insecurity hotspots and ensure COVID-19 recovery for smallholders.

In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, priority countries include Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and SIDS. In the **Near East and North Africa**, the programme will focus on Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen. In **Asia and the Pacific**, it will work in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Timor Leste and the Pacific SIDS.

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Recommended citation **FAO**. 2020. *FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme - Boosting smallholder resilience for recovery: Protecting the most vulnerable, promoting economic recovery and enhancing risk management capacities*. Rome.
<https://doi.org/10.4060/cb0286en>