



FAO requires  
**USD 5.8 million**



to assist  
**175 000 people**



**41 400 people**

facing acute food insecurity  
at crisis or worse levels\*



**1 056** cases of confirmed  
COVID-19 and **51 reported deaths**  
(July 2020)



**1.4 million** children and  
youth affected by COVID-19 school  
closure (World Food Programme)

\*Source: Global Report on Food Crises 2020

## Impact of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture

- Following the first cases of COVID-19 in Liberia, the Government progressively put in place a series of urgent and essential measures to mitigate the spread of the pandemic, including the closure of schools, businesses and borders (both internal and with other countries), and movement restrictions for people and the transportation of goods. While critical, these measures have had indirect negative impacts. Although certain exemptions were made in May regarding measures linked to production, distribution and marketing of food, medicine, essential staff and fuel stations, overall the agriculture sector has been significantly affected. Land preparation and planting of rice (during April–June) require labour and access to inputs, which were both affected by the containment measures. Moreover, scarcity of seeds, fertilizers and machinery in several counties have delayed planting and will likely affect production. To overcome these shortages, many farmers managed to cross borders, but with the risk of higher exposure to the virus.
- Moreover, the import of animals from neighbouring countries, as well as animal feed, was suspended due to health-related border closures, leading to a shortage of meat and increase in prices. Poultry farmers suffered particularly from the lack of feed, usually imported from Guinea, as well as day-old chicks also usually imported from neighbouring countries.



- Prior to the pandemic, market prices had already increased due to the depreciation of the exchange rate. In March 2020, cereal prices were nearly 65 percent higher than the five-year average. From March to May, food prices increased further for all key food commodities monitored due the restrictions in place, as well as farm gates prices from the beginning of May. Despite efforts to ease the transportation of food commodities, prices have not yet stabilized. The marketing of cash crops, which are essential to farmers' livelihoods, cocoa coffee and rubber, was also significantly disrupted.
- Populations' income and purchasing power have thus been affected, in particular for vulnerable farming households. With the economic deterioration reported in early 2020, the effects of COVID-19 restrictions, the start of the lean season (June–September) and the limited expected outcome of the main agricultural season, food insecurity is expected to significantly deteriorate.

## Likely evolution of the impacts of COVID-19 on food security

Following the onset of the pandemic, the Government declared a state of emergency in the country, which has been extended to 21 July 2020, putting in place a series of essential containment measures. In June, a gradual easing of some of the measures led to slight economic improvements; however, the number of COVID-19 reported cases is increasing which may lead to the adoption of stricter measures again. The main expected impacts may include the following:

**Paddy rice production could be significantly affected and lead to the deterioration of households' food insecurity.** Adequate rainfall is supporting soil moisture conditions for the ongoing paddy rice crop, the only cereal grown in the country. However, forecasts of below-average rainfall during July–September are likely to have a negative impact on crop yields. In addition, smallholder farmers are having difficulties accessing markets due to COVID-19-related restrictions. An acute shortage of fertilizers has also hampered crop production. As of end of May, farmers in central regions were behind schedule compared with the farming season due to the pandemic, and the majority have just started clearing their farming areas in the upland for rice production, while farmers in lowlands have not started clearing and planting. Delays and possibility of a below-average harvest could contribute to declining incomes and increased food insecurity in the latter part of 2020.

**Damage to vegetable and cash crops farming could affect rural incomes.** At the end of May, the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in Lofa County, Liberia's lead farming area for rice, cocoa and coffee, while a serious shortage of pesticides was reported in the northern part of the country. In the upcoming months, farmers' incomes could be significantly affected as vegetable farming activities and cash crops are hindered by

COVID-19-related restrictions. Moreover, due to the border closure with neighbouring countries, i.e. Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Mali, the supply of cattle, goats and sheep is reduced resulting in inadequate supply of fresh meat in markets as well as increased prices. Furthermore, the pandemic has affected the export of cocoa and coffee, as exporters are no longer able to purchase these commodities, which are rapidly perishing in the warehouses. Similarly, the impact of COVID-19 resulted in the interruption of activities of palm oil farming communities, affected by food insecurity and in urgent need for food supplies.

**Households' purchasing power may further decline, exacerbating peoples' vulnerabilities.** GDP growth is projected to contract by 2.5 percent in 2020 according to the International Monetary Fund, as lockdowns are negatively impacting domestic demand, net remittances, capital inflows and the banking sector. Higher cost of commercial transport due to movement restrictions is also causing increased prices of food crops in the capital. At the local level, increases in the price of cassava and of farming inputs were observed. Should these essential but restrictive measures be kept in place, increased prices and declining income opportunities will affect vulnerable rural households over the coming months.

## Anticipatory actions and response

Within the framework of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Corporate COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, the following actions have been identified to support the most vulnerable populations' agricultural production and livelihoods in areas with high malnutrition and poverty levels. FAO's main targeted populations are: (i) subsistence and small-scale producers; (ii) agricultural labourers (landless farmers); (iii) labourers along the rural and urban value chain; (iv) women farmers; and (v) vulnerable agricultural households, fishers and fishing communities. The actions also represent FAO's contribution to the United Nations Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19.

### 1) Ensure vulnerable and smallholder farmers' access to the required inputs to increase agricultural and livestock production

FAO will continue to support smallholder farmers through the distribution of inputs such as tools, fertilizers, feed, cuttings, seeds, livestock and fingerlings to help households maintain their livelihoods and productive capacity. To secure the value chain, FAO will facilitate market accessibility through the provision of motorbikes as well as mobile/digital tools and platforms to connect farmers networks to traders and markets. All activities will be implemented through adequate standard operation procedures and safe distribution practices to mitigate the risks of spread of the virus. Three tractors and assorted spare parts have been procured to facilitate farmer groups with timely preparation of their land for planting, so farmers do not miss the season and production is sustained.

### 2) Support the One Health approach by preventing animal health-related diseases, controlling transboundary animal and zoonotic diseases as well as food-borne diseases.

FAO will work with its governmental partners (the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health through the National Public Health Institute of Liberia) to ensure the prevention and control of zoonotic diseases such as rabies, Lassa fever and avian influenza through awareness raising and the establishment of risk-based surveillance systems.

### 3) The impact of COVID-19 on the agriculture sector and food security is analysed to better coordinate interventions

FAO is supporting smallholders and the main actors involved in the agri-food systems, including production, processing, transport, storage, value addition and trade of crop, livestock, fishery and forest-sourced products to strengthen their resilience. Specific activities focus on the following:

- Purchase rice seed from farmers for distribution. With the lockdown, travel restrictions and overall state of emergency, accessing imported seeds has been a challenge. Therefore, FAO purchased rice seeds produced by local farmers. However, given challenges linked to the national seed certification system (which is under formalization), FAO ensured that said purchase was done through the national agricultural research institution (Central Agricultural Research Institution) for quality assurances.
- Provide livelihood assistance to local community youth. FAO provided sustainable livelihood support to hundreds of youths in six conflict-prone communities during COVID-19 thereby contributing to enhancing social cohesion. USD 2 per deliverable (one metre on a head dyke) was provided to youth volunteering to help construct irrigation superstructures in Boi, Konia and Yealla – in Lofa County, Liberia's most productive county in terms of agriculture – and Salala, Bong County. This helps bridge the gap created by loss in income opportunity.

### 4) Develop effective policy responses to reduce the negative impact of COVID-19 on agriculture, food security and livelihoods

FAO will work to achieve the strategic objective of Liberian Agriculture Sector Investment Plan in order for vulnerable households to access adequate and diversified nutritious food, while providing evidence-based policy recommendations and technical support to: (i) promote and support national comprehensive food security and nutrition surveys; (ii) establish food security and nutrition information and monitoring system; (iii) improve emergency preparedness, response and contingency plan; and (iv) promote and support social protection for vulnerable people.



## Funding



FAO requires  
**USD 5.8 million**

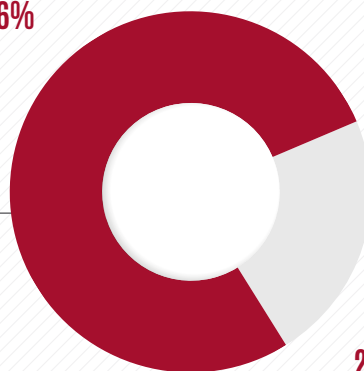


to assist  
**175 000 people**

FUNDING GAP

**USD 4.5 million**

**77.6%**



**22.4%**

RECEIVED

**USD 1.3 million**

### Resource partners

the European Union,  
the International Fund for  
Agriculture Development  
and FAO's own resources

## Coordination and partnerships

FAO's response will be implemented in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Transport. FAO will also coordinate with the World Food Programme and the United Nations Development Programme to provide socio-economic analysis and integrated assistance to vulnerable populations. Information and awareness messages will be adapted to the World Health Organization's models to reach as many people as possible, especially in rural areas.

### RECOMMENDED CITATION:

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