The issue

Informal workers, including micro-entrepreneurs, are among the most vulnerable to the negative impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Because of the simultaneous food supply and demand shocks caused by the crisis, they will face severe losses and financial burdens. Specific groups of workers, including women, youth, indigenous people, and migrant workers, who are overrepresented in the informal economy, will be disproportionally affected. In particular, previous crises and economic recessions have shown that youth are among the groups requiring most support to regain employment or income status. More than 95 percent of young rural workers worldwide are in the informal economy. They are 40 percent more likely than urban youth to be involved in casual waged labour without a contract. To better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth, in March 2020, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) launched rapid assessments in Guatemala, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda, the results of which inform the formulation of this programme.

The action

1. **Skills development and psychosocial support:** Gender and age-sensitive psychosocial support, as well as distance tutoring and training on agri-food systems, value addition, online marketing, business resilience and innovation, green job-related skills and additional topics based on labour market-demand. Learning programmes, at least partially adapted into multimedia formats, will be rolled out through local digital channels and community media, partnering with local champions and organizations as infomediaries.

2. **Business resilience and innovation:** Design support or facilitation of access to stimulus packages for informal rural entrepreneurs, especially young women and men, including advisory services and targeted rural finance measures (recovery grants, soft loans and insurance) for them to sustain, reinvent or adapt their businesses (for example, by acquiring equipment to manage post-harvest losses or accessing new distribution channels).

3. **Digital marketing and labour intermediation:** Collaboration with start-ups, private-sector and existing digital platforms to increase informal micro-entrepreneurs’ access to virtual marketplaces, as well as to establish rural-adapted labour intermediation mechanisms for waged workers, which facilitates the access of rural people to information on job opportunities in the public and private sector.

4. **Occupational safety and health (OSH) and decent work promotion:** Promotion of coordination between public sector, MSMEs, producers and
workers’ organizations (including women and youth organizations) to enhance working conditions in the agri-food sector, including by promoting formalization, written contracts, access to social protection and guaranteeing agri-food and rural workers’ OSH and adequate COVID-19 preventive and protective measures.

Expected results

1. At least 4,000 rural informal agripreneurs and waged workers (70 percent of them youth and 50 percent women) have access to social protection, training, occupational safety and health measures, finance and advisory services.

2. At least 2,000 informal rural entrepreneurs (70 percent of them youth and 50 percent women) are supported to sustain or recover their businesses and/or scale up innovations.

3. At least 2,000 unemployed or underemployed rural people (70 percent of them youth and 50 percent women) have access to waged job opportunities.

4. At least 30 workers and producers’ organizations have strengthened capacity, further benefiting at least 10,000 rural workers with assistance on formalization, access to social protection and OSH, and in particular on how to respond and recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

Partnerships

Ministries of agriculture, labour, economy and youth; financial institutions; youth, producers and workers organizations; centers for technical and vocational education and agri-business incubators; the private sector; development organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UN Women and the Inter Agency Network for Youth Development.

Programme links

The programme will tie in with FAO’s Integrated Country Approach for boosting decent jobs for youth in the agri-food system, the Green Jobs for Youth initiative and the FAO–UNIDO Opportunities for Youth in Africa (OYA) joint programme. It complements FAO’s programmes on rural women’s economic empowerment, social protection, collective action and inclusive finance and links directly with the Hand-in-Hand Initiative.

Country focus

Africa: Egypt, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Latin America: Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras

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