The issue

In North Africa and Near East (NENA), the COVID-19 crisis disrupted agricultural and food chains, thus impacting livelihoods, business, and the whole economic and financial system. The recovery from the impact of COVID-19 crisis will require political commitment coupled with more effective use of limited resources to render food systems more robust and resilient. The response will also require an explicit focus on providing evidence-based policy advice to member countries to support measures for strengthening the resilience of food systems to shocks. There is urgent need to strengthen the policy support at country level to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

Experience from the Food and nutrition security impact, resilience, sustainability and transformation (FIRST) suggest that building policy in-country support is an effective way to strengthening policy support to member countries and to strengthen the enabling environment for food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture. In the NENA region, the programme is implemented only in Palestine. Strengthening policy support in countries in the region is expected to assist in addressing food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture COVID-19 related issues in the region and will accelerate the highly needed policy support for member countries in the region. This programme is also expected to contribute to implementation of Zero Hunger of the Arab countries at regional level. Lessons learned from previous crises show that integrated policies and a comprehensive set of actions are needed to ensure adequate recovery. In tandem, member countries need to be supported in designing such policies and actions to promote improved and sustainable productivity.

The action

To address the impact of COVID-19 on agriculture and food systems, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will strengthen its support to target countries to pinpoint specific short, medium-and long-term actions to ensure the proper functioning of food systems. FAO will also address analytical gaps and gather evidence on the impact of alternative policies in response to food-system failures and crises; thus, enhancing understanding of how food, systems may be better prepared in the future to shocks. The following priority areas of work are proposed:

- Provide policy support to the countries in order to improve their capacities in policy and programme design and implementation, both at national and subnational level.
- Assess the impact of policies, plans and programmes on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture.

Related FAO policy notes on COVID-19

- COVID-19 and its impact on food security in the Near East and North Africa. How to respond?
• Strengthen governance and coordination mechanisms to make them inclusive and open to all ranges of stakeholders, while making sure that the most vulnerable are represented.

Expected results

1. Policy analysis and recommendations to mitigate the negative impacts of disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19, on food and nutrition security, and sustainable agriculture undertaken.

2. Policy monitoring systems at country level to track the impact of policy on food systems developed.

3. Capacities to review and develop national policies and programmes to address the emerging challenges posed by COVID-19 strengthened.

4. Zero Hunger for the Arab region supported.

5. Policy options to strengthen food systems resilience to failures and crises developed.

6. Strategic coordination and joint governance among sectors and stakeholders to enhance inclusive policy dialogue put in place.

Programme links

This work will tie in with the European Union–FAO Food and nutrition security impact, resilience, sustainability and transformation (FIRST), the Zero Hunger Global Policy Facility, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, the Global Network Against Food Crises and FAO’s work with the Green Climate Fund. It will build on the FIRST policy officer network supporting ongoing policy work at national level and expand support to a broader range of countries.

Partnerships

The regional programme will tie in with Food and nutrition security impact, resilience, sustainability and transformation (FIRST), which is a partnership between the European Union (EU) and the FAO.

Country focus

Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Sudan

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