



FAO requires
USD 4.25 million



to assist
150 000 people



1.3 million people
facing acute food insecurity at
crisis or worse levels*



1 347 confirmed
COVID-19 cases (24 June 2020)



2019/20 cereal production was
15% below the five-year average



60% of households spending
over 65% of their income on food
(March 2020)

*Source: Permanent Interstate Committee for drought control in the Sahel (CILSS) *Cadre Harmonisé*, Sierra Leone – Acute Food Insecurity Analysis (June–August 2020 projection), April 2020

Impact of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, food access in Sierra Leone was already constrained due to inflation and the depreciation of local currency for the past three years, with below-average crop production and high dependency on imported foodstuffs. Furthermore, the effects of the 2014–2016 Ebola virus disease outbreak in the country are still felt today. There is, therefore, an urgent need to address not only health-related needs, but also the social and economic conditions of the most vulnerable populations.
- Following the first reported cases of COVID-19 in the country in March 2020, the Government put in place urgent and essential measures, including lockdown, movement restrictions and market closures to slow the spread of the virus. In addition, the fear of contracting the virus led over 60 percent of the population to stay at home, resulting in a general economic slowdown and income losses.
- Below-average cereal production resulted in increased import requirements for 2020 in the context of inflation and depreciation of the exchange rate that has been continuously occurring for three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a timely start to the rainy season in late March, the 2020 main planting season (April–July) for rice – the main staple crop – is being disrupted by movement restrictions, and limited access to land, inputs and agricultural labour. Significant seed shortages have been reported due to market disruptions, while farmers have



consumed part of the seeds meant for planting as they were struggling to access food. This is all likely to affect the outcome of the 2020 main cropping season as well as the following season.

- The effects of COVID-19 on the supply chain of food and other imported commodities have exacerbated the existing trends of increased food prices in Sierra Leone. Cereal prices were already above average due to currency depreciation and high dependency on food imports. In March 2020, the majority of households were spending most of their income on food, and since then income losses and a decline in remittances have further hampered access to food. In addition, the effects of the essential health-related containment measures have affected the flow of farm produce to markets.
- The latest *Cadre Harmonisé* (March 2020) projected that over 1.3 million people would face acute food insecurity at crisis or worse levels during the lean season (June–August 2020), mainly in the districts Bonthe, Kenema and Moyamba; however, the analysis was carried out prior the COVID-19 pandemic and did not take into account its effects nor of the related containment measures. The situation has been exacerbated by market disruptions, mainly affecting smallholder farmers, urban slum dwellers and other vulnerable groups such as female-headed households. The main causes of food insecurity include limited access to markets and increased food prices, and subsequent adoption of negative coping mechanisms such as reduced and irregular food consumption.

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

Movement restrictions and disruptions to the input supply chain are likely to affect the outcome of the main agricultural season. Restrictions could also affect harvests in September, as well as processing and transportation of produce to markets. Reduced production and increased post-harvest losses, combined with rising food prices, are likely to further affect food security and nutrition over the coming months. The main anticipated indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are the following:

- **Effects of COVID-19 combined with the lean season and forecast heavy rains to further deteriorate the food security situation.** The effects of COVID-19 triggered reduced purchasing power and employment opportunities, which are expected to further exacerbate the food security situation, especially during the lean season (June–August). Forecast heavy rains, flash floods and mudslides are also expected in coastal areas. Furthermore, animal health capacities are weak and mostly dependent on partners' support to prevent seasonal outbreaks, including *peste des petits ruminants* in sheep and goats, foot-and-mouth disease in cattle and Newcastle disease in poultry. About 4 million people are facing stressed conditions (Phase 2) and are at risk of slipping into worse levels of acute food insecurity, if the necessary safety nets are not in place.
- **Drop in external and internal demand is curtailing economic activities.** According to a recent survey conducted by the International Growth Centre, 71 percent of interviewed business owners reported difficulties in reaching customers due to essential health-related government restrictions, while more than half of the business owners reported a drop in demand as well as difficulties accessing suppliers. Moreover, international and local procurements are being delayed due to COVID-19-related shipping disruptions. Suspension of air traffic to Sierra Leone for a three-month period is also delaying receipt of air cargo. As a net food importing country and in combination with internal transport restrictions, the logistical challenges will not only affect agriculture value chains but eventually food security.
- **Continued rise in commodity prices to push more people into poverty.** Inflationary pressure prior to COVID-19 had already forced many households to reduce the numbers of meals to one per day. Continued disruptions to the national and international food supply chain, movement restrictions and plummeting purchasing power are likely to push more people into poverty and in need of assistance in the coming months.

Anticipatory actions and response

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone in March 2020, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) focused on rolling out its strategic plans within the Country Programming Framework to support and provide technical assistance to the Government of Sierra Leone. These strategic plans are in line with the country's agriculture sector development policies, Sustainable Development Goals and FAO's regional initiative priorities.

The agriculture sector accounts for the majority of the country's GDP. While the sector contributed to over 50 percent of the GDP between 2016 and 2019, it is likely to be significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on lessons learned from the 2014–2016 Ebola virus disease outbreak, FAO, in line with other United Nations agencies and partners, is taking steps to complement preparedness measures taken by the authorities through the development of a response plan to address vulnerable people's needs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting the Government in preparing its own strategic documents. Within the framework of FAO's Corporate COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, the proposed actions have been identified to meet the urgent short-term needs of the most vulnerable food-insecure populations and protect their assets. It also represents FAO's contribution to the United Nations Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, through the Humanitarian Response Plan process initiated at country level in April 2020, as well as the Government of Sierra Leone's Quick Action Economic Response Plan (FAO co-chairs the pillar on local food production).

FAO has already mobilized its own resources to implement anticipatory actions and provide critical agricultural production inputs to vulnerable households, and protect livelihoods through post-harvest management training for farmers who are mostly women. The intervention will also support the livelihoods of youth groups with entrepreneurship training, and food processing, conservation, packaging, marketing and transport equipment.

1) Ensuring availability of and stabilizing access to food for the most food-insecure populations

- Provide time-critical inputs and training; support continued production, transformation and marketing of food products.
- Support livelihood diversification and home production.
- Support the assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on households' food security and agricultural livelihoods.

2) Ensuring continuity of the food supply chain

- Support harvesting and the reduction of post-harvest losses (storage and processing).
- Support monitoring and market intelligence for global and local food supply and commodity price.
- Support the food value chain (production, processing and marketing, etc.).
- Strengthen agricultural cooperatives to maintain negotiation power for farmers and access to mechanization facilities.

3) Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of transmission

- Raise awareness at local level to reduce risk of virus transmission.
- Develop guidelines and protocols for compliance with hygiene/safety measures during planting, harvesting, selling, etc.
- Partner with the World Health Organization (WHO) to share messages and raise awareness on COVID-19 among food chain actors, and on food safety and food diversification.
- Conduct dedicated awareness raising sessions among local farmers.
- Train personnel from Sierra Leone's Central Veterinary Laboratory at Teko, the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute, Njala University and the Milton Margai College of Education and Technology on COVID-19 testing.
- Deliver personal protective equipment and masks, including for animal health personnel.



Funding



FAO requires
USD 4.25 million
under the Global Humanitarian
Response Plan for COVID-19

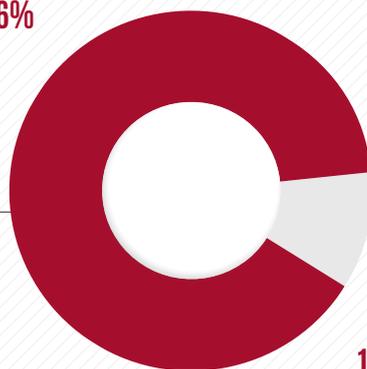


to assist
150 000 people

FUNDING GAP

USD 3.81 million

89.6%



10.4%
RECEIVED
USD 440 000

Resource partners

the Governments
of Belgium and the
United States of America,
and FAO's own resources

Coordination and partnerships

FAO's response will be implemented in close collaboration with the Government as well as with Food Security Sector partners and United Nations agencies. In rural areas, FAO's interventions will be in line with WHO messaging to ensure information and awareness raising on the COVID-19 pandemic.

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RECOMMENDED CITATION:

FAO. 2020. *Sierra Leone | Humanitarian response (May–December 2020): Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb0210en>