



FAO requires
USD 9.6 million



to assist
209 400 people



734 200 people facing
acute food insecurity at crisis or
worse levels*



70% of the population lives
in rural areas, with the majority
relying on agriculture for their
livelihood



+70 700 returnees
from Thailand and China
(as of 28 May 2020)

*Source: Global Report on Food
Crises 2020

Impact of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture

The humanitarian situation in Myanmar is characterized by a complex combination of vulnerability to natural disasters, food insecurity, malnutrition, armed conflict, inter-communal tensions, displacement, trafficking and perilous migration. The situation is compounded by chronic poverty coupled with inequalities and discrimination, including those related to gender, disability, ethnicity and religion, which have exacerbated the needs and vulnerabilities of affected people in many parts of the country.

So far, the Yangon/Bago metropolitan region of Myanmar has been most affected by COVID-19, while 10 out of 15 states and regions have reported cases. There have been no confirmed cases in internally displaced person (IDP) camps or host communities. In case of a major surge in numbers, the health system would be quickly overloaded with only one hospital bed for 1 111 people and 100 intensive care units beds for the entire country. As assessed by the Global Health Security Index, Myanmar performs averagely (72 out of 195 countries) in terms of its preparedness and readiness to prevent, detect and response to disease outbreaks and pandemics, and is especially exposed to risk factors related to disasters, conflict and public health that make it more vulnerable than many countries to pandemics. Moreover, fighting is worryingly reported to be intensifying in different parts of the country, particularly in Chin and Rakhine



State, where internet blackouts and media shutdowns have cut civilians off from vital information about the pandemic.

On 13 March 2020, the Government set up the Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of Coronavirus Disease, and responded with a wide range of urgent and essential measures to prevent the spread of the virus. These included curfews; banning public gatherings; closing pre-schools and kindergartens, private schools, public events, entertainment venues, restaurants, and religious institutions; organizing quarantine facilities; tracing close contacts of COVID-19 patients; locking down townships with a relatively high number of cases; promoting physical distancing; and imposing a strict stay-at-home order.

While food production does not yet seem to have been impacted, rural livelihoods are facing increasing financial pressure in the midst of decreasing incomes and remittances as the planting season begins. Quarantine measures in China and Thailand, and the closure of many factories in Thailand in February and March 2020, after outbreaks of COVID-19, resulted in workers from Myanmar in these countries losing their jobs and returning home, typically to rural areas. This has created additional needs for humanitarian

assistance, including in areas not regularly served by humanitarian organizations. Furthermore, farmers relying on foreign markets to export high value commodities have been left without market access, as cross-border movement is restricted especially in states and regions along the border. Overall, the agri-food system is being adversely affected by falling internal and external demand for commodities due to movement restrictions, low wages, business closures and export bans.

Several localized assessments conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) found that the impact of movement restrictions varied in different states and regions as well as across sectors. COVID-19 related measures were found to have had a significant impact on food production, market access, prices of produce, quality and prices of agricultural inputs, food availability, employment, and income generation, in the areas where research was undertaken. A recent survey conducted by FAO reported a significant reduction in the sales of agricultural inputs and increase in prices, due to an inability of potential clients to access markets or shops, travel restrictions, and constraints in the exchange of goods between states and regions in Myanmar.

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

While communities with formal access to land may be more protected from immediate supply shocks due to the availability of local food systems/markets, movement restrictions that affect access to agricultural inputs will have a significant impact on food production, mainly of rice with the start of the harvest during the next dry season (October–November). Landless labourers and daily wage earners likely are and will be most affected by this, particularly those residing in conflict and natural hazard-prone areas who are already vulnerable.

The return of 70 000 registered migrants in addition to the thousands more that are believed to have travelled back to Myanmar through unofficial border crossings will lead to an abrupt termination of remittances.

This will increase rural unemployment and may result in people resorting to harmful coping mechanisms, such as obtaining high interest loans (which in turn may perpetuate a cycle of poverty/debt), limiting food portions, and reducing dietary diversity.

Furthermore, IDPs, stateless people in Rakhine and other vulnerable crisis-affected people in Chin, Kachin, Kayin, Rakhine and Shan State included in Myanmar's humanitarian response strategy for 2020 as well as returning migrants, who were not included in the strategy, are among the groups most at risk should outbreaks occur. Already limited access to adequate health care among these groups is likely to be further constrained if the virus spreads to these areas.

Anticipatory actions and response

Due to COVID-19, FAO cash-for-work activities planned for April–June 2020 in Rakhine State to improve community assets and disaster risk reduction infrastructure have been postponed to the upcoming dry season (October 2020).

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.

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

- Support vulnerable households in accessing inputs and maintaining the production of staple crops, livestock and aquaculture to improve livelihood diversification as well as the cultivation of backyard gardens to ensure the further availability of fresh food.
- Provide community animal health workers with training and equipment to build their capacity to support communities and deliver animal health services.
- Carry out the extensive scale-up of cash-based interventions including reprogramming cash for work to cash+ (unconditional cash transfers delivered with agricultural inputs and mechanization training). This will complement existing government social protection schemes targeting the most vulnerable pregnant and lactating women.

2) Ensuring continuity of the food supply chain

- Provide farmers with harvesting equipment and training on harvest and post-harvest management, coupled with the introduction of improved technologies.
- Facilitate access to markets (information, transport, logistics, and private sector direct linkages) with a specific focus on maintaining the negotiation power and access to markets of local producers' groups and advocating for key food item corridors.
- Strengthen the availability of agricultural products on the market by providing transport vouchers and facilitating commercial relationships within the different value chains.

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

- Raise awareness at local level to reduce the risk of virus transmission, and amend agricultural extension modalities and protocols for compliance with hygiene and safety measures across the agricultural supply chain. Dedicated attention will be given to raising awareness within local farmers markets and enhancing community engagement.

To complement the proposed interventions, it is critical to continuously assess and monitor COVID-19 impacts, including identifying potential hot spots requiring closer monitoring and assessing potential impacts on farmers, as well as actors along the value chain.



Funding



FAO requires
USD 9.6 million

- **USD 2.8 million** under the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19
- **USD 6.8 million** under the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020

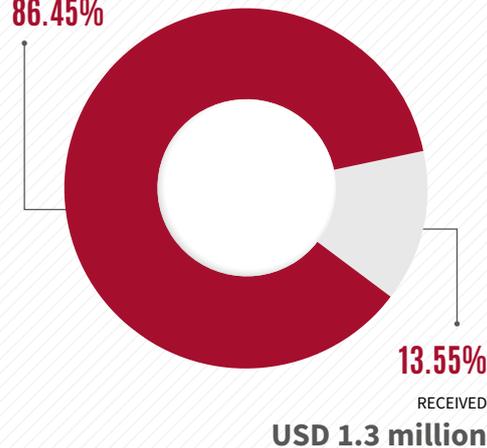


to assist
209 400 people

FUNDING GAP

USD 8.3 million

86.45%



Resource partners

the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European Union

Coordination and partnerships

- FAO is working in close coordination with various government authorities, including the General Administration Department, and union, state and township level departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. Furthermore, FAO has also strengthened its partnership with national and international non-governmental organizations, and is actively working with other United Nations agencies including the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations International Children's Fund.
- FAO plays a key role in coordinating the Food Security Sector as co-lead with WFP.

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