



# National agrifood systems and COVID-19 in Pakistan

## Effects, policy responses, and long-term implications

This country profile covers responses and effects up to end of June 2020

### INTRODUCTION

---

The COVID-19 pandemic has put significant pressure on health systems all around the world. The drastic measures established to contain its spread are creating serious impediments to economic activity (including agrifood systems) and, consequently, to livelihoods and food security and nutrition.

The COVID-19 outbreak demonstrates both how health and food systems are linked to one another, and how local food systems are linked to global systems. High rates of urbanization and the globalization of trade and travel have contributed to the spread of the virus across countries. Lockdowns and movement restrictions within countries and across borders have disrupted national and local food and agricultural output and input markets and have caused sharp reductions in overall economic activity globally. In poorer countries, disruptions have further exacerbated the fragility of systems (including agrifood systems) and livelihoods.

*The Global Report on Food Crises 2020* found that 135 million people in 55 countries and territories are facing acute food insecurity at “crisis” level or higher – a situation that requires urgent action. The report further concluded that over 183 million people were experiencing a “stressed” level of acute food insecurity and bore a high risk of sliding into a “crisis” level if confronted by with additional shocks (FSIN, 2020). The situation is particularly worrisome in light of the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the situation evolves, the question arises as to how, or whether, food, health and financial and economic systems could become better prepared to prevent similar outbreaks from escalating into a full-blown economic and social crisis.

This report is part of a series of country profiles that describe: (i) policy measures enacted by governments to contain the spread of the virus; (ii) policies and measures to stabilize the functioning of agri-food systems; (iii) potential effects of policies on agri-food systems and vulnerable groups. Finally, the profiles also assess longer-term options for agri-food system policies and investments so as to make them more resilient.

## POLICY MEASURES TO CONTAIN COVID-19

---

### What major measures have been taken to contain the spread of the virus? How are they evolving?

When the first coronavirus case was reported in Pakistan in late February 2020, the provincial governments, followed by the federal government, imposed a strict nation-wide lockdown. All non-essential sectors (i.e. other than food and health) were closed. Food and medicine were only available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Inter- and intra-city/province transport was completely banned; religious and other gatherings were prohibited; domestic and international flights were suspended; and international borders were closed in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus. After two months of strict lockdown, active cases in Pakistan had fallen below projections and the governments decided to ease the lockdown. The following provides details of the policy measures taken by the federal and provincial governments from early May until the end of June 2020.

The decision to "ease down" on 9 May aimed to overcome the economic losses arising from the strict lockdown. The joint decision by the federal and provincial governments was based on the increase in coronavirus cases being far less than earlier projected (the curve had flattened by mid-April – instead of a projected 50 000 cases, total cases were only 14 000). The lockdown was relaxed in a step-wise manner, with particular days assigned to the opening of shops in non-essential sectors. During the month of Ramadan, all sectors, essential and non-essential, were allowed to operate from dawn until 5 p.m. Inter- and intra-city transport was also allowed. In Sindh, the most restricted province, however, a curfew-like lockdown was imposed on Fridays from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. to discourage people from attending congregational prayers. Sindh also regulated large religious processions, which are normally carried out by a minority group, limiting them to 20 people per procession. The army was brought in to help the police maintain law and order and to ensure that standard operating procedures (SOPs) were followed.

After 9 May, people flocked to shopping malls across the country, paying little attention to the SOPs. Consequently, the governments of Punjab province and the Islamabad Capital Territory decided to impose a lockdown until the end of May, but this measure was not fully enforced. The lockdown was relaxed for three days during the Eid Festival. After Eid, shops were allowed to operate from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. only due to an increase in the number of cases across the country. Most offices also reopened around this time.

Although shops were only allowed to open if they followed SOPs, neither shopkeepers nor the general public have paid them much heed, despite repeated warnings from government. As of 24 June, the country had over 189 000 cases of COVID-19. Curfews were imposed from mid-June till 2 July in severely-affected hotspots in major cities, like Karachi, Lahor and Islamabad. The federal and provincial governments have urged people with symptoms to self-isolate and stay out of hospitals except for emergencies; private hospitals have reached full capacity in major cities, and government quarantine facilities are almost full as well. There are shortages of beds and ventilators, and outpatient departments are not fully functional.

Pakistan closed the borders with neighbouring countries in early March to contain the spread of coronavirus. The federal government authorized the resumption of international flights into and out of Pakistan as from 20 June, subject to SOPs. International flights had been banned for nearly two months, since the end of March. Domestic flight operations were also restored in mid-May. Prompted by trade disruptions and losses, the federal government decided to reopen the Afghanistan border in mid-May and the Iran border in mid-June.

## AGRIFOOD POLICY MEASURES TO RESPOND TO THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

---

### What are the major measures (in place or expected) to be enacted aiming at the food system directly?

The federal and provincial governments sought to keep food sales unrestricted during the lockdown and to penalize hoarding and price gouging by retailers; this discouraged panic buying of food (although not of medical items and equipment). The federal government and the National Accountability Bureau in Pakistan are taking strict actions against wheat and sugar hoarders.

There has been a lack of clarity around certain government guidelines on exports, which has created uncertainty among agrifood system stakeholders. Onion exports were officially banned from the end of February until 31 May 2020, although there has been no clear instruction from the government on lifting the ban. Tomato exports were also banned during the same period. Potato exports are permitted, as domestic supply is sufficient for 12 months and will likely increase during the upcoming harvest season in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan provinces. An absence of a clear list of other exportable items resulted in some export shipments (such as rice) being stopped at port. There has been also some confusion as to the permissibility of some imports (e.g. live animals, such as dairy breeder cows) due to fears around sanitary and phytosanitary issues and zoonotic disease risks in the context of COVID-19. Efforts by trade associations, agriculturists, food industrialists and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have led the government to issue clarifications and relax some restrictions, especially relating to the movement of goods within and between provinces, to and from the Karachi port, and out of Sindh into other districts .

In the rural areas of most provinces, only a partial opening of wholesale livestock, vegetable, fruit and other markets has been reported, despite the fact that the government has permitted all markets to operate since the beginning of the outbreak. Many rural markets were unable to adjust their operations to accommodate government SOPs and increased hygiene standards, forcing them to close. Federal and provincial governments allowed agricultural workers to return to the fields at harvest-time in mid-April, but because of the lack of intra- and inter-provincial transport, skilled labour was hard to find and produce was often unable to reach the markets.

The combination of border closures, suspended flights and banned transport has had significant negative impacts on the agricultural sector in Pakistan. This prompted the government's Economic Coordination Committee to introduce a relief package, which included a subsidy of PKR 925 (USD 5.58) per bag of diammonium phosphate (DAP) and other phosphoric fertilizers for the next Kharif season (April to October 2020), and PKR 243 (USD 1.47) per bag of urea. The total subsidy provided by the government amounts to 37 billion PKR (USD 223 375 512) and will be distributed to farmers through a scratch card scheme (The International News, 2020c). A further PKR 2.3 billion (13 885 505) will be spent during the next Kharif season on subsidies for cotton seed and white fly pesticides, at the rate of PKR 1 000 (USD 6.04) per acre for more than 800 000 hectares in Punjab and Sindh. The mark-up on agricultural loans has also been reduced from 18.4 percent to 10 percent. This subsidy would amount to PKR 8.8 billion (USD 53 127 149).

The amount of PKR 4.7 billion (USD 28 374 727) has been reserved by the government for the relief of the poultry sector, in the form of delays in bank instalments and reduced markups. Chicken is the most widely-consumed meat in Pakistan, being affordable by most people. However, due to the lockdown and lack of social gatherings, the consumption of chicken has fallen along with prices.

The multisectoral relief package introduced by the federal government includes USD 600 million for agriculture; nearly half of the population of Pakistan relies on agriculture/livestock as their primary or secondary source of income. Additionally, USD 1.69 billion will be used to procure 8.2 million tonnes of wheat during the current season. The Punjab government has offered PKR 15 billion (USD 90 557 640) worth of interest-free loans to farmers, crop insurance for 250 000 farmers and 1.2 million sacks of seeds for the next wheat crop.

### **What policy measures are in place or expected that aim to mitigate the effect of the crisis on vulnerable groups and their livelihoods?**

The federal and provincial governments in Pakistan have attempted to address the unemployment and wage losses of workers in non-essential sectors and workers who have been unable to travel to find work during the crisis. There are huge challenges. According to the Ministry of Planning, 18.53 million people (or 30 percent of the workforce) could lose their jobs in case of a total shutdown, with a loss of wages amounting to 783 billion (USD 4 721 949 621) for three months (Decca Herald, 2020). In order to provide new employment opportunities, the federal government has started hiring daily wage workers to plant trees in its 10 Billion Tree Tsunami programme.<sup>1</sup> Over 63 000 workers have been hired to plant saplings, earning PKR 500 (USD 3) per day, half the daily earnings of an average daily wage worker (Aljazeera, 2020). Despite the easing of the lockdown, a majority of daily wage workers remain unemployed due to the state of the economy.

The Government of Pakistan announced that PKR 1.25 trillion (USD 7 538 233 750) would be spent on a multi-sectoral relief package to address the challenges arising from the pandemic (OCHA, 2020). The economic package includes USD 1.2 billion for relief to the daily wage workers and labourers: PKR 12 000 (USD 72.37) will be disbursed to each worker every month through an existing social protection system, the 'Ehsaas' programme.<sup>2</sup> Taxes on food and health supplies, amounting to USD 90 million, have also been removed to make these items more affordable by the poor.

The Utility Stores Corporation (USC) will use USD 300 million to provide five basic edible commodities, including flour, pulses, sugar and ghee, at subsidised rates to charitable organizations, which then distribute them in ration packs. It was observed during FAO staff field visits that it was not just a one-time support. However, no estimates exist as to how many ration bags are distributed and where. The result was that a lot of families got many ration bags at the same time from different organizations and people were selling them in the markets. Residents in Karachi were only given ration bags if they had a valid computerised national identity card (CNIC) and were not listed, but there were leakages in the programme. Ration pack contents are purchased at regular stores as well as at USC outlets. There is no record of what happens to the items after purchase. Charitable activities and organizations are mostly privately organized but are commonly requested to assist both governments and the United Nations to conduct mass relief efforts.

The government has increased the monthly stipend provided by the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) from PKR 2 000 (USD 13) to PKR 3 000 (USD 18). A cash transfer programme

---

<sup>1</sup> Launched in 2018, the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami programme aims to expand and restore Pakistan's forests over a period of five years.

<sup>2</sup> The Ehsaas programme was designed by the current federal government to provide cash and/or ration bags to people living below the poverty line. Eligible people can access the cash transfer every month by showing their national identity card. An earlier programme, the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), was introduced by a previous government in 2008, and is currently functioning under the Ehsaas programme under its auspices but its name and identity have not been changed. Relief was provided to people through both the Ehsaas programme and BISP

targeting the country's poor, BISP reaches five million families. In the provinces, non-governmental and philanthropic organizations have been working in partnership with government, both as implementers and as fundraisers. The requirements for 'no objection certificates'<sup>3</sup> for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been relaxed to speed the process of helping unemployed and poor people, but a major impediment is that data held by federal government is urgently required by provincial governments to initiate and monitor these schemes, including against fraud.

### How is the government funding the measures described above?

The federal and provincial governments in Pakistan are funding measures to combat the crisis, primarily by redirecting existing funds from development budgets (Pakistan Today, 2020). The federal government has appealed to international financial institutions and donors, which have come forward with donations, concessional loans and budget support, in particular to respond to the Pakistan Preparedness Response Plan (PPRP), which is nearly fully funded. The federal government has established a Prime Minister's COVID-19 Pandemic Relief Fund and has appealed to citizens (including those living abroad) to donate funds to counter the effects of the economic downturn caused by COVID-19.

Pakistan has received significant support from the international community. For example, the United States of America donated USD 2 billion in relief financing to Pakistan and will provide a further USD 15 million to address the impacts of the pandemic (Express Tribune, 2020b). The United Arab Emirates (UAE) sent an aid plane containing 14 metric tonnes of medical and food supplies to Pakistan to bolster the country's efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19 (Ahmed, 2020). China has also promised its support, stating that Pakistan will not face shortages in medical equipment (The International News, 2020b). Japan provided USD 4 billion in direct budget support in mid-May, which was in addition to the USD 3 410 000 the Japanese government had already provided to Pakistan through international non-governmental organizations.

The World Bank provided initial support of USD 240 million in new financing and repurposed its existing financing to support Pakistan's urgent health response, social safety nets, distance learning and food security (The Express Tribune, 2020). It is currently ramping up its support to provide over USD 2 billion in new financing and up to USD 1 billion in repurposed funds, including USD 130 million in grant funding, over the next 15 months. In June, the World Bank awarded Pakistan an additional USD 500 million in loans to combat the pandemic. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) extended grant assistance worth USD 2.5 million and repurposed USD 50 million from the National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF) for pandemic and health needs at the national and provincial levels. USD 500 million worth of countercyclical support facility and USD 300 million in emergency assistance lending were approved by the ADB in May. In addition, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided 1.4 billion USD and the European Union provided USD 150 million to Pakistan to combat COVID-19.

---

<sup>3</sup> Humanitarian and aid organizations are required to have such certificates, which indicate approval from the provincial government to start projects in specific area.

## IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS ON MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND THE AGRIFOOD SYSTEM

---

### What are the immediate effects of the crisis and the different sets of measures on agrifood systems?

#### Food prices, supply and demand

- According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 8.2 percent between May 2019 and May 2020. During the same reference period, the CPI increased by 7.3 percent and 9.7 percent for urban and rural customers respectively. Food inflation has risen by 10.94 percent for urban consumers and by 13.73 percent for rural customers since the start of the pandemic (FAO, 2020), with prices of some items, like wheat flour, increasing by over 15 percent in certain areas. The next production season will need to be carefully monitored, as there is a risk of production losses due to the desert locust invasion, which is likely to impact the non-desert, irrigated cropping areas.
- With regard to staple grains, according to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR)'s daily reports on food commodity availability and prices, as of 15 June, Pakistan had about 7.71 million tonnes of wheat available in the public sector. The carry-over stocks are 637 000 tonnes, and so far, the provincial governments and PASSCO (the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation) have been able to procure 80 percent of the total target.
- An analysis of average prices during 5 to 11 June, compared to the week of 29 May to 4 June, shows that prices for wheat and wheat flour both increased by 1.6 percent. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the average price of wheat has remained unchanged, while the price of wheat flour per kilo has increased by 13.3 percent from PKR 43.6 (USD 0.26) to PKR 49.4 (USD 0.30).
- Pakistan has a net surplus in rice production and is a major exporter. Hence, no supply issues are anticipated with regard to rice. The prices of IRRI (regular) and basmati rice have increased by 8.8 percent and 3.1 percent respectively since the crisis began.
- The price of mash increased by 0.01 percent and those of moong, masoor and gram decreased by 0.5 percent, 0.8 percent, and 1.4 percent respectively during the week of 5–11 June as compared to the previous week. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, overall, the prices of pulses have increased substantially: masoor by 14 percent, moong by 20.3 percent and mash by 11.3 percent, while the price of gram has decreased by 4.4 percent.
- Pakistan relies heavily on imported pulses. As of 9 June, current stocks of local and imported mash, moong and masoor can last 22 days, 25 days, and 3 months respectively. In 2020, 266 550 tonnes of gram have been imported and the production of local gram is forecast at around 385 000 tonnes, according to the Pakistan Food Forecast for Rabi 2019–20 (FAO, 2020). Despite available stocks of pulses and imports, hoarding may create shortages of these pulses in some markets.
- Sufficient stocks of the three main retail meats are available (beef, mutton and chicken), with supplies likely to be greater than usual, due to the shutdown of banquets and restaurants. During the analysis period, small price increases were observed for beef and mutton (1 percent each). Since the outbreak began, prices for both beef and mutton have risen slightly, by 4.9 percent and 5.3 percent respectively.

- Price increases have been observed for fresh milk (1 percent) and eggs (5.9 percent), while chicken prices declined by 11.7 percent during the week of 5-11 June as compared to the previous week. This decline may be attributed to the fact that Eid-ul-Adha is approaching and chicken meat is not consumed during this period. In general, the price of fresh milk has increased by 3.4 percent since the outbreak began, while the prices of chicken and eggs have increased substantially at 28.5 and 20.3 percent respectively. The reason for increase in chicken prices is unclear. Chicken prices decreased initially due to the ban on gatherings and celebrations during lockdown (chicken is special occasion food for the poor). However, they have been rising since. According to a statement by an official in the Pakistan Poultry Association, poultry prices are related to rupee-dollar parity since most of the vitamins that chicken consume, such as soybean (sic), have to be imported.
- The cost of production soared and, as a result of the suspension of flights and border closures, perishable items such as mangoes were difficult to export, causing wastage and income loss. Mango exports are expected to decline by 40 percent this year because of the lockdown of sea and air routes. Although international flights are now allowed, many mango producers have been forced to sell their highly perishable crop for low prices in the domestic markets. Wooden boxes measuring 7–9 kgs were previously sold for around USD 6–7 in urban centres, but this year producers are selling them for approximately USD 2 each, which does not recover the cost of picking, packing and transportation. There has been also a negative effect on cotton producers, although the economic impact has not yet been quantified.
- According to estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO), 2.9 million salaried workers involved in crop sowing and harvesting are at risk due to the restrictions imposed by government to curb the spread of COVID-19.

#### Food trade and logistics, including storage

- The movement of agricultural produce, processed food, agricultural inputs and agricultural labour has been restricted since the outbreak and things have not yet returned to normal, although it has been over a month since lockdown was eased.
- Communities in Balochistan that relied on regular imports and exports (informal and formal) from and to neighbouring countries, especially Iran, reported a drop the movement and availability of goods and, although the Iran border has now reopened, it is too soon to predict how this will affect the export of food items from the province. During field visits, people ascribed the drop in availability to the border closure specifically.

#### Access to agricultural and livestock inputs, including machinery

- Since the onset of COVID-19, fertilizer prices have dropped a bit, with the price of urea decreasing by 4.2 percent and that of DAP decreasing by 1.4 percent. Stocks of fertilizers appear normal, but field observations indicate that access to these products, especially by small farmers, is hindered by lack of information or consistency in easing lockdown arrangements on transport and the operation of businesses, such as shops selling fertilizers, seeds, fodder and pesticides as well as the intermediaries (agriculture agents, or *arthis*) that sell these products.



### **What have been the effects of the crisis and government measures on livelihoods, food security and malnutrition status, and future prospects?**

A quarter of the population of Pakistan lives below the national poverty line and around two-fifths are multidimensionally poor. Food insecurity is very high, with 20–30 percent of the population (40 to 62 million people) experiencing some form of food insecurity. An estimated 36.43 million people are persistently and chronically vulnerable to food insecurity and also highly exposed to natural hazards and shocks, including the ongoing pandemic. An additional 2.45 million people could become food insecure as a result of any medium-scale shock (OCHA, 2020).

Most of the immediate effects of the health and economic crises have arisen from: i) reduced economic activity due to the lockdown, which disrupted the work and earnings of many informal daily wage labourers; ii) the flight of newly unemployed daily wage labourers from cities back to their rural homes, increasing the number of people per household that have to be sustained during the lockdown; and iii) the limitations of existing social protection programmes. A large number of extremely poor people in Pakistan lack access to banking services and/or have no proper identification. Relief programmes, cash transfers and subsidies, are only available to people with a national identification card (NIC). The federal government has made efforts to improve the registration of the poor and has expanded the Ehsaas programme from 5.2 million to 12 million households. Although many extremely poor people, especially women, continue to face challenges in becoming registered, the COVID-19 situation has led to important progress in the BISP and other social protection programmes.

All health facilities and hospitals have been closed until recently except for those providing emergency services. While this measure was taken to control the spread of the virus, the lack of access to out-patient services, immunization, preventive health care, family planning, emergency obstetric and newborn care and pre- and post-natal care could lead to increases in mortality, particularly of mothers and children. Women and children are likely to face greater risks of domestic violence at this time due to restrictions in movement and heightened tensions around income insecurity, lifestyle changes and generalized fear about the pandemic. There are tightly-defined gender roles in Pakistan and the domestic burden and responsibilities placed on women during the lockdown have become heavier than normal.

Buying patterns are slowly getting back to normal. Although many people are buying less because of unemployment and the loss of daily wages, the 'smart' opening of non-food, non-essential and non-medical sectors of the economy has increased purchases by people who can afford to shop. The reopening of takeaway restaurants, and the extension of their opening hours until 10 p.m. during Ramadan has helped the overall recovery of consumption levels.

### **Which groups are most likely to be severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated measures?**

Women and children from disadvantaged households, home-based workers, domestic workers, daily wage earners (particularly in informal sectors of the economy, including in small shops, self-employed persons and families) have already been severely impacted by the pandemic. Pregnant and lactating women face a much greater risk of malnutrition, due to the increased cost of a healthy diet. Higher prices for nutritious food items have caused a decline in dietary diversity among the poor.

Nearly half of households in the country rely on agriculture and livestock as their primary and/or secondary source of livelihood, 22 percent of which depend on daily wage labour



(skilled/unskilled non-agricultural labour, forestry work). Around 62 percent of households in the poorest quintile rely on farm labour and daily wage for their livelihood strategies (OCHA, 2020).

The Newly Merged Districts (NMDs) of Pakistan, which were formerly part of the Federally Administered Tribal Area, are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic. According to the World Food Programme (WFP)'s Comprehensive Food Security and Livelihood Assessment (CFSLA) Report 2020 (WFP, 2020), a majority of the households in the NMDs (65 percent) are dependent on unsustainable livelihood strategies (daily wages), while the remaining (35 percent) depend on somewhat sustainable sources.

Pakistan hosts approximately 1.4 million Afghan refugees, who are registered in the Afghan National Registration (ANR) database managed by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and issued with Proof of Registration (PoR) cards. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that more than 70 000 Afghan refugees face additional challenges (women and children at risk, single parents, the elderly, people with serious medical conditions). In addition, 600 000 Afghani Card Holders (who are waiting for a passport and visa to leave Pakistan), and an estimated 400 000 million undocumented Afghans also reside in Pakistan. These are among the poorest populations in the country; they desperately need social protection in the present circumstance but are rarely able to receive it due to documentation issues (OCHA, 2020).

Around 2.4 million people were affected by a drought in 2018 are also among the most vulnerable populations due to COVID-19. Because of a significant decrease in rainfall over the past few years, parts of Sindh and Balochistan suffered a drought like situation in 2018. Although NGOs and government have tried to provide assistance to those in need, 2.4 million people are still at risk. Since 2019, a desert locust outbreak has threatened food crops, orchards and fodder. Approximately 1.5 million people have been affected by this infestation and the government has yet to provide adequate relief. In January 2020, Balochistan and Gilgit Baltistan experienced heavy rainfall and snow, which affected half a million people. Relief is yet to come (OCHA, 2020). In 2015, due to federal security operations, five million people were temporarily displaced from the northwestern province. Although 95 percent have safely returned home, they lack basic social services and livelihood opportunities. During the COVID-19, their situation has deteriorated. Overall, about six million people in Pakistan are at severe risk, as reported in the United Nations Global Humanitarian Appeal and Response Plan (GHRP) for Pakistan.

## **FOOD FOR REFLECTION: LONG-TERM POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

---

**This section serves to initiate thinking and dialogue on the longer-term implications of COVID-19 in terms of management of the food system to prevent a health crisis and that a health crisis turns into a food security and nutrition emergency.**

Structural factors exacerbate the impacts of crises like the current pandemic; these include the lack of effective coordination between federal and provincial governments, inadequate health facilities and lack of outreach to rural areas.

Smallholders and large-scale farmers were both affected – albeit in different ways – by disruptions to the food supply chain. Small-scale farmers faced challenges in producing and transporting their produce, ensuring timely inputs at a fair price, gaining access to markets and a fair selling price for their goods, and minimizing food losses along the supply chain, while large-scale farmers found it difficult to hire daily or formally-employed workers during the lockdown.

To strengthen existing food supply chain management, government should ensure adequate transportation standards and the availability of storage points in main markets and cold chains in order to minimize food losses. Promoting the export of diverse products, such as canned fruits and jams, could make up for the loss of fresh fruit when proper transport and storage are not available, adds value to the raw product, reduces food losses and might be a valuable new source of foreign exchange. Assured access by farmers to essential agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizer and pesticides is also critical if Pakistan is to avoid economic losses in future crises. Normally these inputs are distributed to farmers in villages through specialized units operated by government when possible. During the pandemic, because of a ban on transport, seeds and other inputs could not be transported to these units on time.

Pakistan has employed a number of successful measures during the crisis, such as food deliveries and electronic transactions, including social protection cash transfers; these are likely to continue and expand. The government recognizes the need for innovative, technology-based solutions to support agriculture and the food supply chain. Financial aid and social security payments can easily and efficiently be made available to farmers through Easypaisa<sup>4</sup> or the system used by the BISP. Linking agricultural production to transport, markets and consumers through the use of digital technology and e-commerce can significantly strengthen the supply chain, as well as creating jobs, improving women's access to markets and connecting far flung communities to market opportunities. The modernization of agriculture is crucial, as are efforts to address cross-cutting needs, such as poverty reduction, education, training, research and technology, and best practices and logistics for small and medium enterprises. The aim is a food and agriculture system that supports livelihoods, ensures food security and helps mitigate the impacts of future crises, health or otherwise.

Pakistan does not generally provide school meals. Children go home for lunch. Besides, 44 percent of children were out of school even before the pandemic. However, a pilot programme has been launched in 13 schools in the capital by the Ministry of Education and the World Food Programme. An expansion of the programme may provide substantial help to poor households.

## INFORMATION AND GOVERNANCE

---

### Information

- The lack of coordination between the federal and provincial governments has been evident throughout the COVID-19 crisis, especially in the Sindh province where the national ruling party is not in power (The International News, 2020c). The federal government has not favoured the lockdown because of the impact it will have on Pakistan's already fragile economy. Some provincial governments, on the other hand, want to curb the spread of the coronavirus first and deal with its economic implications later, given that they are on the front line, facing heavy caseloads and managing the availability of medical facilities in densely populated cities. This has led to mixed messages and some confusion at provincial and federal government levels. Chaired by the prime minister, the National Coordination Committee was designed to gather input from all provinces before deciding on matters pertaining to the virus but it has not yet resolved the ambiguity. Well-coordinated governance structures are critical for a quick and efficient response to such a crisis. As most critical services including health and social protection are now the responsibility of the provinces, each is making decisions independently. However, border control and aviation

---

<sup>4</sup> Established in Pakistan in 2009, Easypaisa is a mobile wallet and a provider of mobile payments and branchless banking services.

remain with the federal government and the provinces lack jurisdiction to tighten surveillance at airports.

- The absence of local governments is also making matters worse. In a populous country like Pakistan, local governments are needed for disease control as well as for providing relief through leveraging local networks.
- Real-time data on impacts and vulnerable populations is needed for the proper design and targeting of most emergency interventions; such data is largely lacking in Pakistan. For instance, cash transfers and ration bags in Sindh are mainly distributed to people that are able to reach out to the government through a helpline (Hafeez, 2020). In order to avoid such a scenario in the long run, the governments need to invest in a database of vulnerable populations, along the lines of what BISP to leverage digital innovation to improve outreach.
- The uncertainty in food markets during the crisis indicates that governments should play a more active role to disseminate information on food markets so that farmers can make rational production decisions. By strengthening the data gathering and analytical capacity of the MNFSR, government can ensure informed national decision-making processes.
- The government should continue to strengthen National Food and Nutrition Security Information System and its flagship knowledge products, the Pakistan Overview of Food Security and Nutrition (POFI) and Pakistan Food Forecast.

## Governance

- A National Coordination Parliamentary Committee has been set up to review, assess and monitor matters pertaining to the pandemic. The Committee is responsible for coordination between the federal government and provinces in an attempt to both curb the spread of coronavirus and mitigate the economic/social effects of the pandemic. As noted above, this committee is challenged by some ambiguity as to messages and roles.
- The Government of Pakistan launched Pakistan's Preparedness and Response Plan (PPRP) in a bid to suppress and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The PPRP, worth USD 595 million, is intended to strengthen Pakistan's capacity for emergency preparation, response and relief for a period of nine, months from April to December 2020.
- The government has established, under the overall coordination of the UN Resident Coordinator and with support from UNDP, a COVID-19 Secretariat in the Planning Commission whose task is to prepare a coordinated economic and social response and interventions. The United Nations Country Team, including FAO, which has overseen food security aspects, has designed a socio-economic plan for the federal government that focuses on five key pillars: health, social protection, economic recovery, macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration, and social cohesion and community resilience. This plan reflects both a short-term immediate response to cope with the most exigent socio-economic risks and impacts of the COVID-19, along with medium to long-term policy, regulatory and institutional measures to bring a holistic perspective to the response plan.
- The Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination issued a National Action Plan with guiding principles for outbreak preparedness, containment and mitigation.
- The federal government is contemplating the establishment of a coronavirus ordinance to speed up procurement and provide protection against personal liability for healthcare professionals. Punjab is using the WHO's Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) for coronavirus to cost future health-related interventions.

- Finally, the United Nations has finalized its Global Humanitarian Response Plan, which includes humanitarian support for vulnerable people in Pakistan that have been affected by natural hazards, displacement, COVID19 and locusts.

## REFERENCES

---

**Ahmed, A.** 2020. COVID-19: UAE sends aid plane containing 14 metric tons of medical and food supplies to Pakistan. In: Gulf News [online]. Dubai. [Cited 29 April 2020]. <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/covid-19-uae-sends-aid-plane-containing-14-metric-tons-of-medical-and-food-supplies-to-pakistan-1.71232570>

**Aljazeera.** 2020. Pakistan's virus-idled workers hired to plant trees. In: *Aljazeera* [online]. Doha. [Cited 29 April 2020]. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/pakistan-virus-idled-workers-hired-plant-trees-200429070109237.html>

**Deccan Herald.** 2020. Pakistan says COVID-19 to take heavy toll on economy, fears 18.5 million job losses. *Deccan Herald*, 3 April 2020. (available at <https://www.deccanherald.com/international/pakistan-says-covid-19-to-take-heavy-toll-on-economy-fears-185-million-job-losses-821023.html>).

**The Express Tribune.** 2020a. Pakistan hails global support for Covid Response Plan. *The Express Tribune*, 27 April 2020. (available at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2208322/pakistan-hails-global-support-covid-response-plan>).

**The Express Tribune.** 2020b. US helps Pakistan in its COVID-19 battle. *The Express Tribune*, 15 May 2020. (available at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2208322/pakistan-hails-global-support-covid-response-plan>).

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).** 2020. *COVID-19 emergency in Pakistan: evolution of prices of major food items since COVID-19 outbreak (February 28- June 11, 2020)*. Islamabad.

**Food Security Information Network (FSIN).** 2020. *Global Report on Food Crises 2020*. Rome. (available at <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/1272014/>)

**Hafeez, T.** 2020. COVID-19: Sindh government launches mobile service to provide ration to needy. *The Express Tribune*, 24 March 2020. (available at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2183022/covid-19-sindh-govt-launches-mobile-service-provide-ration-needy-daily-wagers>).

**Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination.** 2020. *National Action Plan for Corona-virus disease (COVID-19) in Pakistan*. (available at [https://www.nih.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-NAP-V2-13-March-2020.pdf?\\_\\_cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk\\_\\_=6ed62a3942083513e2f39b0d701cb9d78a04ad9b-1600776333-0AXsL1QsqY0wfPtEhEYptDyv5yKhQbwW2SQwbHkkEWw4zlwuHnLpoAf6I9Guyxih46hIHfs6MYm5cCFS9BE3iwxuVWhLwWHqRzDSY57cnhzKbW6Rsz2kLM7tnvbWOAlbzgCeQA9eUWA4yY\\_fOKKJN4DOGHGL6jPAmsQGoAoZ5zFpQzfTvbBRIhJ23Qp1rHnojBiznhFt96MgOnc-gzYj4TpuINix0Pt6jR7a01\\_GLExymG8r1Oc53SdoJ1ph6YrgGMAOPAH\\_PfTFnYvVPlc1KOzdrPX4Shw\\_h9YQ8Xb2bX8LP8grOS-7-z-NoLLGbd7AfX\\_nsSk\\_VAFMfXzVm9JG0Oe2rgyAqCa3l9GDHyTOo1lG](https://www.nih.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-NAP-V2-13-March-2020.pdf?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=6ed62a3942083513e2f39b0d701cb9d78a04ad9b-1600776333-0AXsL1QsqY0wfPtEhEYptDyv5yKhQbwW2SQwbHkkEWw4zlwuHnLpoAf6I9Guyxih46hIHfs6MYm5cCFS9BE3iwxuVWhLwWHqRzDSY57cnhzKbW6Rsz2kLM7tnvbWOAlbzgCeQA9eUWA4yY_fOKKJN4DOGHGL6jPAmsQGoAoZ5zFpQzfTvbBRIhJ23Qp1rHnojBiznhFt96MgOnc-gzYj4TpuINix0Pt6jR7a01_GLExymG8r1Oc53SdoJ1ph6YrgGMAOPAH_PfTFnYvVPlc1KOzdrPX4Shw_h9YQ8Xb2bX8LP8grOS-7-z-NoLLGbd7AfX_nsSk_VAFMfXzVm9JG0Oe2rgyAqCa3l9GDHyTOo1lG))

**The International News.** 2020a. ECC approves relief package for agriculture sector. *The International News*, 14 May 2020. (available at <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/658606-ecc-approves-relief-package-for-agriculture-sector>).

**The International News.** 2020b. China's support to Pakistan on COVID-19 reflects deep-rooted friendship. *The International News*, 21 April 2020. (available at <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/647477-china-s-support-to-pakistan-on-covid-19-reflects-deep-rooted-friendship>).

**The International News.** 2020c. Civil society activists criticize Centre for 'undermining Sindh's fight against coronavirus,' *The International News*, 14 April 2020. (available at <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/643911-civil-society-activists-criticise-centre-for-undermining-sindh-s-fight-against-coronavirus>).

**Pakistan Today.** 2020. Govt redirects \$40m non-utilized WB funds to fight coronavirus. *Pakistan Today*, 20 March 2020. (available at <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2020/03/20/govt-redirects-40m-non-utilised-wb-funds-fight-coronavirus/>).

**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).** 2020. *COVID-19 Pakistan socio-economic framework*. New York. April 2020. (also available at [https://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/library/development\\_policy/covid-19-pakistan--socio-economic-framework.html](https://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/library/development_policy/covid-19-pakistan--socio-economic-framework.html)).

**United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).** 2020. *Global Humanitarian Response Plan for Pakistan COVID-19 Pandemic*. New York and Geneva. (available at <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/pakistan/document/pakistan-humanitarian-response-plan-covid-19-pandemic-2020>).

**World Food Programme (WFP).** 2020. *Comprehensive Food Security and Livelihood Assessment (CFLSA) 2020*. (available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WFP-0000118584.pdf>)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This country profile is part of a series produced by the Food and nutrition security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST) Programme. In developing these profiles, the FIRST Programme – a strategic partnership between FAO and the European Union – responds to calls for support from governments and development and humanitarian partners. In some countries, FIRST has joined forces with the Global Network against Food Crises.

The process to produce this profile was led by **Genevieve Hussain**, FIRST policy officer, and **Zara Khan**, in close collaboration with the FAO Representation in Pakistan and the European Union Delegation to Pakistan. The profile has benefitted from the contributions of the FIRST management team.

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of FAO and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.



CO-FUNDED BY THE  
EUROPEAN UNION



Some rights reserved. This work is available under a [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/) licence

Recommended citation: FAO. 2020. *National agrifood systems and Covid-19 in Pakistan. Effects, policy responses and long term implications*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb1343en>