



## Food systems transformation

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### The issue

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses and vulnerabilities in food systems, and revealed opportunities for increasing their sustainability. Restrictive measures imposed to slow its spread have caused disruptions and blockages of food markets for a broad range of food products especially perishables. Supply disruptions have reduced access to agricultural inputs and have led to price volatilities, food waste and losses as well as shifts in consumer demand, food choices and access. Consumption patterns also shifted, due to reduced supplies, lower incomes, closure of food outlets, drastic lifestyle changes, or a combination of these factors.

“Building back better” post COVID-19 has to occur at multiple levels. Seeds are among the first links in the food chain. FAO defines seed security as ready access by rural households, particularly farmers, to adequate quantities of quality seed and planting materials, adapted to their agro-ecological conditions and socio-economic needs, at planting time, under normal and abnormal weather conditions. Ensuring seed security is a critical and recurrent issue in disaster response and recovery and investing in seed development is the first step in the provision of diverse diets.

Addressing the vulnerabilities in food supply chains requires improving infrastructure, logistics, technologies and the capacities of those involved in producing safe, diverse and nutritious food. Efficient and sustainable supply chains will minimize food loss and waste and protect the health of people and the environment. Shortening value chains, where relevant, preserving and protecting local, traditional foods can be supported further through responsible investment in agriculture. This will support peri-urban food production and ensure year-round availability of diverse and safe vegetables and fruits. Digital technologies and innovations can play a vital role in enhancing food safety, traceability and facilitate quicker and direct sales to customers.

Fresh markets are the primary points of sale of fresh food in the Asia and Pacific region. They are a source of livelihoods and key to the food security and nutrition of millions in the region. However, when not managed properly fresh markets can pose serious health risks to the population they serve. This is because the congregation of people, the presence of live animals, the proximity of animal origin and plant origin food, the lack of adequate facilities and poor sanitation can create favourable conditions for the spread of diseases and contamination of food rendering it unsafe. The authorities often close down these markets after a food safety incident or the spread of disease as happened in the case of COVID-19. This may temporarily halt the health threat but such measures only address the symptom, not the cause. It also reduces traders' income and blocks access for millions of people to fresh, nutritious foods and increases the risk of malnutrition.

### Budget

USD 50 million

### Time frame

Jan 2021 – Dec 2024

### SDGs



### FAO Regional COVID-19 Policy Briefs

- ▶ Food supply chain and trade disruptions in Asia under COVID-19: A Regional analysis with policy response options

## The action

### 1 Improving access to seeds

This action track aims at ensuring the supply of seeds for food production during disruptions such as the current pandemic and beyond, while increasing agro-biodiversity and encouraging climate smart practices. It will:

- ▶ build on the foundation laid by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Food Security Reserve (AFSR) Agreement and ASEAN plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) that earmarks 67 000 metric tonnes of rice for member countries as an emergency mechanism to develop a seed bank for rice and horticultural crops;
- ▶ strengthen the network of existing community, local and national seed banks as part of ASEAN facility;
- ▶ use data from the ASEAN Food Security Information System, agrometeorological and other sources to direct seed distribution, multiplication and cropping in appropriate agro-ecological zones;
- ▶ provide regional support to national seed security efforts, address regional seed shortages through collective actions and foster regional cooperation for digitization of linked services.

### 2 Strengthening local food production chains

This action track aims at supporting value chain operators to mitigate the immediate and medium-term impacts of COVID-19. Depending on the country, it could include slaughterhouses, fruit and vegetable outlets, fish farming, milk and dairy chains, so that they become more resilient and sustainable. It will:

- ▶ assess local production and market systems and current enabling environments to develop recommendations for reliable supply chains including safety and quality assurance through Good Agricultural Practices and other standards;
- ▶ strengthen capacities of national and local institutions to coordinate and plan for resilient and sustainable urban and peri-urban agriculture value chains for food security and nutrition;
- ▶ strengthen capacities of value chain actors in the selected urban and peri-urban region on climate-resilient and sustainable agriculture and food production systems;
- ▶ enhance business and food safety capacities of stakeholders along the supply chains, including vendors in food markets.

### 3 Improving fresh markets

This action track aims at bringing in large-scale changes and introduce innovations and technologies to improve health and safety conditions in fresh markets in pragmatic and participatory ways. It will:

- ▶ use geospatial information to map the location of urban, peri-urban and rural fresh markets in countries of the region and the dynamics of the supply chains that access them;
- ▶ assess the state of fresh markets and develop criteria for their classification based on parameters linked to socio-economic conditions, planning, zoning, transport, biosecurity, food safety and other criteria;
- ▶ develop participatory approaches to involve all stakeholders – government, supply chain and market actors and civil society – in the regulation, management and maintenance of fresh markets;
- ▶ develop strategies for food safety and hygiene, food loss and waste reduction and management, other basic services and emergency preparedness;
- ▶ strengthen governance and build national and regional models for fresh markets as safe public spaces;
- ▶ stimulate demand for fresh food at affordable prices and create opportunities for farmers to sell produce directly to consumers.

### 4 Making digitization accessible to farmers, youth agripreneurs and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to support resilient food transformation

- ▶ build on needs and requirements assessments, develop the capacities of farmers, youth and women entrepreneurs and SMEs to acquire accessible, affordable and innovative digital technologies and platforms enabling smart farming, digital rural services and food marketing;

- ▶ foster private-public partnerships to promote targeted digital technologies, applications and digital business and market platforms, linking technology users (farmers, input suppliers, finance providers, rural service enterprises, final buyers) with technology providers and operators;
- ▶ develop capacity, digital literacy and financial incentives schemes for broad access to technologies, platforms and business opportunities for small-scale farmers, young entrepreneurs and SMEs in agriculture and rural sector;
- ▶ support policy and governance capacities to design digital strategies, enact digital policies and regulations, and implement monitoring and standard setting requirements for the proper functioning of digital agriculture, including facilitating the private provision of digital applications, digital platforms, and regulatory protocols for product traceability technologies, and e-commerce.

## Expected results

- 1 **ASEAN seed bank established** as a ready source of seed for member countries and the emergency mechanism strengthened;
- 2 **technical including digital capacity of ASEAN** augmented to manage the AFSR and APTERR;
- 3 **resilience of selected value chains increased and access to more diverse local markets provided** through better connectivity, improved technologies, processes and related best practices and innovations that build efficiency, resilience and sustainability;
- 4 **fresh markets transformed** from a place of food safety hazards and zoonotic risks to one that offers a safe food shopping experience to millions;
- 5 **food systems governance capacity enhanced**, providing digital-enabled market linkages, supporting local food production capacity, and establishing robust protocols for certified food chains, and food quality standards.

## Partnerships

FAO will continue to build on its existing partnerships with national authorities including multiple Ministries, agencies, urban and rural local administrations. It will leverage strategic partnerships with the regional bodies, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and the Pacific Community (SPC). It will work with the Tripartite (with the World Health Organization and the World Organisation for Animal Health) on One Health; International Financial Institutions (IFIs); the International Telecommunications Union on digital technologies; multiple donors and resource partners; and sister UN agencies on nutrition and food systems. It will also continue to engage with civil society and NGOs for wider participation of stakeholders as well as with the private sector, particularly on innovations.



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## Regional and country coverage

The actions have broad regional applicability. Specific country proposals can be formulated building on ongoing projects and articulated priorities in national development and COVID-19 response plans.

**Action 1.** ASEAN countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

**Action 2 and Action 3.** Bangladesh, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia, Nepal, Solomon Islands

**Action 4.** Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand.

## Contact

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