



Economic inclusion and social protection to reduce poverty Strengthening rural institutions and organizations in Africa

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The issue

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to push between 26–39 million people into extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and is significantly affecting smallholder family farmers and other small-scale producers. Over 85 percent of all workers across the continent are employed in the informal sector and are vulnerable to poverty and hunger. They lack social protection coverage and support mechanisms should they lose their livelihoods. Among rural actors in SSA, youth are among those most at risk, including 70 percent considered working poor, who require the skills and competencies to engage in on- and off-farm businesses, better access resources (notably finances) and rural employment opportunities. Family farms are the mainstay of food and agriculture production in Africa, employing two-thirds of the African population, working 62 percent of the land. Family farmers support the whole spectrum of food producers in Africa: livestock, crop production- staple food to cash crop producers; for both subsistence and local markets. These family farmers also contribute significantly to ecosystem preservation and environmental protection. Producer organizations play a critical role in food production in SSA, in agrifood system and overall rural development, supporting many smallholder farmers, fisher folk, forest users and livestock keepers, including youth and women. These diverse categories of rural actors are central to agri-food system operations in SSA, significantly contributing to food security and nutrition, and sustainable healthy diets. It is crucial that policies, strategies, investments and actions are put in place to protect and support the recovery of their productive capacity during and after the COVID-19 crisis. They are currently experiencing a severe loss of income and productive capacity as a result of: (1) temporary restrictions on movement, which are hindering market access, as well as the availability of seasonal and migrant labour supply; (2) changes in consumer behaviour and lower demand due to the closure of schools, farmers' markets, restaurants and other public places; (3) disruptions to production (due to shortages of migrant seasonal workers, for example); (4) value-chain disruptions, creating financial challenges and constraining access to necessary inputs, services and operational materials; and (5) limited access to social protection and insurance. Lessons learned from previous crises show that integrated multi-sectoral policies and a comprehensive set of actions are needed to ensure smallholder family farmers have access to productive resources, services, finance and markets. In tandem, rural institutions and family farmer/producer organizations need to be supported to promote improved and sustainable productivity, market linkages, economic resilience and livelihoods.

The action

This programme aims to support rural institutions and organizations in mitigating the impact of COVID-19, ensuring the provision of agricultural, business and financial services to smallholder family farmers. Actions will connect with ongoing national initiatives as part of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming. It will combine

Budget

USD 45 million

Time frame

2021–2024



Related FAO policy notes on COVID-19

- ▶ COVID-19 and smallholder producers' access to markets
Impact of COVID-19 on informal workers
- ▶ Rural youth and the COVID-19 pandemic
- ▶ Migrant workers and remittances in the context of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa
- ▶ Impact of COVID-19 on informal workers
- ▶ Gendered impacts of COVID-19 and equitable policy responses in agriculture, food security and nutrition



expertise on demand-driven, market-oriented extension and advisory services, inclusive rural finance, territorial development approaches and strengthening producer organizations. It will enable increased access to services, financial and other productive resources to support smallholder family farmers in restoring their productive capacity and financial assets, ensuring the continuity of farm and enterprise operations and facilitating adaptive marketing channels and links to end consumers, focusing on innovative approaches and technologies. The programme will also promote the engagement of producer organizations and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises as agents of change with diverse service and finance providers. It will leverage existing and establish new linkages and networks to enable producers to reach markets, diversify and benefit from wider socioeconomic opportunities. It will also promote adequate access to risk-management interventions, including insurance, social assistance and employment guarantees.

Expected results

Overall, the programme will lead to strengthened, resilient and adaptable family farmer and producer organizations, better able to be part of leading the COVID-19 response. It will enhance their capacity in service provision, business management, finance and market access, creating linkages for collaboration with the public and private sectors.

- 1 **Rapid diagnosis** will be undertaken, using a systems approach, of the impact of COVID-19 on smallholder family farmers, mapping the status of their productive resources and needs for services, rural finance and linkages to markets, with attention to existing social and gender inequalities.
- 2 **Targeted smallholder family-farmer actions** will be taken to restore productivity, livelihoods, value chains and market links through inclusive access to a wide range of extension and market-oriented gender-sensitive and advisory services (including e-commerce, innovative and diversified market channels, and shorter value chains) and inclusive rural finance measures, leveraging digital and institutional innovations and territorial development approaches. Financial mechanisms to avoid execution of current debts will also be explored to maintain or enhance access to land, forest and water of small-scale producers affected by the pandemic.
- 3 **Governments' capacity will be increased, and national strategies and programmes** will be developed, in dialogue with United Nations Decade of Family Farming national processes, to accelerate the recovery and bolster the resilience of smallholder family farmers through improved provision and access to services and finance, collective action and innovations.
- 4 **Institutional capacity** will be enhanced to facilitate innovation processes and coordination mechanisms among rural/territorial institutions and stakeholders and ensure access to a wide range of services (from the

private and public sectors), rural finance, social protection and to coordinated and comprehensive responses, with emphasis on the capacity of producers' and women's organizations.

- 5 **Exchanges and learning across countries and regions** will be established through South-South Cooperation on context-specific response strategies, policy options and choice of implementation instruments.

Partnerships

Governments, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank, ADA Microfinance, the Rabobank Foundation, the United Nations Capital Development Fund, regional rural and agricultural credit associations, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UN Women and the Inter Agency Network for Youth Development, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), regional and sub-regional producer organizations (e.g. ROPPA, PAFO etc.), youth groups, migrant and diaspora associations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, South-South Cooperation partnerships.

Programme Links

The programme will tie in with the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF), work for the United Nations Decade of Family Farming, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Integrated Country Approach for boosting decent jobs for youth in the agri-food system, FAO-UNIDO Opportunities for Youth in Africa (OYA) joint programme and the United Nations Network on Migration and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Agenda.

Country focus

Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe

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