



## Food systems transformation Transforming agrifood systems using climate-smart approaches to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic

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### The issue

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is impacting people all over the world, including smallholder farmers whose production, food security, nutrition and livelihoods are under threat. Smallholder farmers who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods are among the most vulnerable not only to the ongoing threat of climate change but also to the severe health and socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. Furthermore, as natural resource managers, they are key actors in a One Health approach.

In our efforts to bolster food systems amid the economic revival from the effects of COVID-19, we should emphasize environmental sustainability and efforts to combat and adapt to climate change as well as build and strengthen resilient domestic and international markets. To achieve these goals, we should take transformative action throughout our food systems. Agricultural development should pursue sustainable increases in productivity adaptation, and mitigation action for climate change, and we must shape our actions based on best practices, for example related to sustainable soil management, water management, livestock management, agroforestry, conservation agriculture, aquaculture, and energy management. Such a holistic approach adapted to local needs and territories can facilitate a transition to agrifood systems that are more productive, sustainable and climate resilient and thus in line with recovery actions needed after the pandemic. In this way, we could preserve and protect the environment and biodiversity to maintain a natural buffer against diseases, while promoting decent livelihoods for farmers and contributing to economic revival.

This initiative proposes coordinated actions by farmers, researchers, private sector, civil society and policymakers towards climate-smart pathways through a holistic approach based on five implementation actions: (1) expand the evidence base; (2) support enabling policy frameworks; (3) strengthen national and local institutions; (4) enhance funding and financing; and (5) implement climate-smart practices in the field (FAO, 2017). This approach differs from 'business-as-usual' approaches by emphasizing the capacity to implement flexible, context-specific solutions, supported by innovative policies and financing. Importantly, sustainability is an integral part of this effort particularly related to production activities. This is fundamental in enhancing food systems' resilience to future crises.

We should rethink our food systems, strengthen domestic food supply chains, and connect farmers to local and international markets, while recalling the importance of producing and sourcing raw materials locally. The necessity of ensuring sufficient local food supply and decent incomes for farmers have become evident during the pandemic, given mobility restrictions imposed by governments.

Crucially, to help national agriculture sectors build back from the COVID-19 pandemic, the project strengthens countries' capacities to ensure that farmers are connected to markets and that populations have sufficient and stable access to healthy diets. This entails supporting governments to work with private sector companies to shorten supply chains to reduce farmers' vulnerabilities and strengthening local agrifood systems to increase availability of – and access to – healthy local food.

### Budget

USD 10 million

### Time frame

2021–2026

### SDGs



### Related FAO policy notes on COVID-19

- ▶ [Interim Issues Paper on the Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition \(FSN\)](#)
- ▶ [COVID-19 and the risk to food supply chains: How to respond?](#)
- ▶ [Food safety in the time of COVID-19](#)
- ▶ [Building to transform during response and recovery](#)
- ▶ [Ensuring quality data and analysis for effective policy support to food systems and Zero Hunger](#)
- ▶ [Protecting the most vulnerable, promoting economic recovery and enhancing risk management capacities](#)

## The action

The project will be structured around two key objectives to contribute to decent livelihoods for farmers in times of COVID-19 and climate change and to improve the institutional and policy environment to foster coordination and coherence. The combination of actions will be context specific and holistic, analyzing constraints and tradeoffs implicit to allow food systems' transformation to build back better from COVID-19.

- 1 Contribute to decent livelihoods for farmers in times of COVID-19 and climate change, by connecting climate-smart producers to markets.
  - Analyzing barriers and best practices regarding market access for smallholder farmers.
  - Reinforcing farmers' capacities (particularly smallholders and young farmers) implementing specific field climate-smart practices previously identified with assessments and analysis.
  - Sharing findings among farmers' organizations, private sector, and government.

The activities will be developed through an evidence base: assessing how food production systems are climate resilient and climate friendly for long-term sustainability of COVID-19 recovery. It will look for synergies between building livelihoods and food systems that are more resilient to epidemics and to climate change at field/farm level and in food value chains.

The project will draw on practices and knowledge of local producers including ancestral and indigenous knowledge using participatory approaches. The project will prioritize female and young smallholders, and other marginalized groups.

Training sessions will be delivered through a combination of online courses and offline field sessions to support farmers, rural advisors, and farm-related organizations when COVID-19 related restrictions will ease.

Prior to the courses, critical gaps of farmers will be assessed to understand their knowledge needs relating to climate change and food security strategies.

- 2 Improving the institutional and policy environment preventing undernourishment due to the COVID-19 pandemic by enhancing local access to food produced through climate-smart approaches.
  - Support relevant enabling policy frameworks through prioritizing climate smart options (according to national development priorities).
  - Aligning existing policies to support prioritized climate smart options and filling policy gaps, where necessary.
  - Strengthening national and local institutions.
  - Enhancing funding and financing options.

These activities are based on an evidence base developed to identify situations, needs and gaps. The evidence base will be analyzed to formulate strategies for increasing

productivity and agricultural incomes and estimate their potential mitigation co-benefits and to build back better from the COVID-19. The development of supportive policies plans and investments, and coordination in the policy-making processes and institutions responsible for agriculture, climate change, food security and land use are required to create this enabling policy framework. This action will be developed through cross-sectoral dialogues to enhance coordination between institutions dealing with agricultural, climate change, social protection, food security and other issues at the local, national, and international levels. Increasing climate information services, data and sharing collection could be a fundamental aspect to transform food systems. Finally, innovative financing mechanisms that improve the links between climate finance and agricultural investments from the public and private sectors will be developed. These could be developed including by introducing sustainability conditions to financial stimulus packages and financial products.

## Expected results

The project aims to transform and reorient agrifood systems to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic by contributing to food security in a changing climate. It will promote increasing productivity and improving livelihoods in a sustainable way, as well as adaptation and mitigation practices to cope with climate change and reduce/remove greenhouse gas emissions. The project will include a particular focus on social, environmental, and economic aspects defending biodiversity, reducing inequalities, empowering women, supporting young agrifood systems actors and protecting the most vulnerable. The project foresees the creation of jobs, increased social protection, and improved food security status of beneficiaries.

Expected results include:

- 1 Farmers' capacities (particularly smallholders and young farmers) reinforced to adopt context-specific sustainable practices that boost food and nutrition security and enhance food systems' resilience to health crises, climate change and other shocks.
- 2 Knowledge on increasing farmers' access to markets and consumers' access to sufficient and healthy food in the context of COVID-19 and climate change developed and shared.
- 3 Policy frameworks and capacities of governments on climate change and agriculture at global, regional, national, and subnational levels strengthened in at least four countries. Training will take into account the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring concerted and sustainable actions to address immediate impacts, while supporting the transition to more sustainable food systems that are more in balance with nature.
- 4 Innovative financing mechanisms that improve the links between climate finance and agricultural investments from the public and private sectors to create an inclusive, green, and resilient post-crisis recovery.



## Partnerships

- Research organizations including Wageningen University & Research: Department of Wageningen Environmental Research and Wageningen Plant Research (The Netherlands), CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), Consiglio per la ricerca in agricoltura e l'analisi dell'economia agraria (CREA), and a university and a national agricultural research centre/institute to be selected in each beneficiary country.
- International Organizations such as the World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- National rural advisory services in each beneficiary country.
- National governments in the countries where the project is implemented.
- Private sector companies to collaborate on market access for smallholder farmers.
- Within the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), a task force, led by Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment (OCB), will include colleagues from offices and units such as the Land and Water Division (NSL), Research and Extension Unit (OINR) and Food Systems and Food Safety Division (ESF). Its objective will be to streamline throughout the Organization field level solutions and possible pathways for policies and investment interventions suitable for each environment/region/country in which the project will operate.

## Programme links

The proposed project links directly to FAO's Strategic Framework 2022–2031 (to be presented to the Conference in July 2021) by contributing to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition; the elimination of poverty; sustainable management and utilization of natural resources.

The project applies all four cross-cutting/cross-sectional accelerators: technology, innovation, data and complements (governance, human capital, and institutions), and it addresses specifically FAO aspirations regarding better production and better environment.

The project builds upon the achievements of the GCP/INT/534/ITA project on Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA).

The project continues collaboration with the Global Alliance for Climate-smart Agriculture, which will be a strong asset for identifying local and international partners.

## Regional and Country focus

The project will work at the international level to ensure a coordinated and holistic method and disseminate knowledge on climate-smart approaches and at the local level to implement climate-smart practices in four countries to be identified in collaboration with partners and donors.

## Contacts

Director, Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment (OCB)

[OCB-Director@fao.org](mailto:OCB-Director@fao.org)

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**  
Rome, Italy



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