Family farmers' and small-scale producers' challenges in the context of COVID-19
United Nations Decade of Family Farming Global Consultation

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDFF) marks the 2019–2028 ten-year period to recognize the contribution of family farming to global food production and food security and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The first pillar of the Global Action Plan for the UNDFF seeks to develop an enabling policy environment to strengthen family farming, an objective that requires the collection of timely data necessary to assess the various dimensions of family farming and small-scale production to inform policy design and implementation.

In the context of the global pandemic, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) piloted a global online consultation on the challenges and strategies of family farmers in the context of COVID-19, focusing on crisis and postcrisis recovery strategies. An online survey targeting family farmers and small-scale producers was developed for this purpose. An additional survey, directed at farmer organizations, was developed, to be tested in the last two months of 2020 and early 2021. After the piloting phase, these survey instruments will be refined to launch a more comprehensive, representative and regular monitoring strategy of family farming during the UNDFF.
About this brief

This brief reports on the findings of a farmer-level survey conducted in the context of the pilot phase of the UNDFF global consultation of family farmers. The purpose of the survey was to monitor the situation of family farming and identify challenges faced by family farmers and small-scale producers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The brief describes the survey and sampling procedure, and the characteristics of the final sample, presented in Section 2. Section 3 discusses the COVID-19 context as well as lockdown measures and policies to which respondents were exposed. Section 4 provides an overview of the agricultural profile of the respondents and their access to agricultural inputs and services, commercialization approaches, risk management strategies and income levels. Section 5 provides discussion and conclusions.

How to use this brief

Monitoring and reporting on family farmers and small-scale producers during the UNDFF is a collective effort of government institutions, civil society, producer organizations and international agencies. Through the implementation of the global consultation, FAO and its partners aim to 1) strengthen data collection, analysis and knowledge generation on the evolution of family farming around the world; 2) build the capacities of producer organizations and civil society to design, implement and analyse their own data; and 3) mobilize consistent and regular data on family farming around the world to inform policy and assess the impact of the UNDFF in strengthening the sector. In addition to analysing the data collected during the pilot phase of the global consultation, this brief provides a methodology for analysing data generated on family farming. It also provides information about the role of sampling in obtaining statistically representative estimates, which organizations should strongly consider when implementing the UNDFF survey instruments. Finally, the farmer questionnaire will be made available on-line for organizations to use and enhance as they collect data on their membership. In the meantime, it is available upon request to the authors. FAO aims to serve as a repository of data that fits the aims outlined above.
2.1 Survey instrument

The farmer-level survey instrument was an online survey with multiple sections covering information on farmer location, gender, membership in organizations, agricultural activities, access to inputs and services, access to credit, risk management strategies, social and financial assistance, and exposure to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The instrument was available in Arabic, English, Chinese, French, Portuguese and Spanish to enable outreach across countries. It was also translated in paper form to Bengali, Odia, Telegu, Tamil and Thai, for implementation in specific geographic contexts. The survey was designed to be practical and accessible for farmers to navigate independently or with the assistance of their farmer organizations.

2.2 Sample design and implementation

Implementation of the survey took place through two mechanisms: (1) an online platform for farmers to self-administer the questionnaire; and (2) in-person interviews administered by farmer organizations. The online survey was launched on 12 October 2020 and remained open to respondents until 30 December 2020, while in-person, paper-based interviews were conducted from 9 December 2020 until 10 January 2021.¹

The survey targeted family farmers and small-scale producers in all regions of the world, with the online platform disseminated through multiple channels, including the Family Farming Knowledge Platform (website and social networks), FAO regional offices and their producer organization networks, Communication for Development initiatives, and various global and regional farmer networks. The dissemination strategy of the online survey was a snowball sampling approach, with initial outreach made through survey launch messages on 12 October 2020.² The initial outreach produced a chain effect in which communication materials were disseminated to the aforementioned networks to promote the survey among producer organizations, which then encouraged take-up among farmers, who were also encouraged and likely to disseminate the survey among

¹ In Thailand, interviews took place from 9 to 31 December 2020, while in India the survey was administered from 11 December 2020 through 10 January 2021.
² Follow-up messages took place in early and end-November 2020, to boost take-up of the survey and reactivate the chain referral dissemination.
peer networks. In sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America, FAO raised awareness of the survey and the objectives of the data collection through existing projects and networks of farmer organizations.

In three countries, India, Indonesia and Thailand, the survey was targeted to small-scale fishers and implemented using in-person, on-paper interviews, facilitated by producer organizations in each country. In India, the East Coast Fish Workers Union (ECFWU) conducted interviews in four states and one union territory in response to the direct expression of interest among small-scale fisher communities in those regions. The survey in Indonesia was conducted by Serikat Petani Indonesia, in collaboration with Kesatuan Nelayan Tradisional Indonesia and Serikat Nelayan Indonesia. These three organizations conducted interviews in seven provinces, employing a random sampling approach to select respondents from the communities in which their membership is based. In Thailand, the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF) collaborated with the National Association of fisher folks Federation in Thailand (FFF) to implement the survey in 56 provinces, addressing both inland and coastal fisheries, as well as aquaculture. In the three countries, paper-based questionnaires were later entered into the same digital platform as the online survey.

This brief provides a general overview of respondents' characteristics in terms of geographic area, demographic characteristics, agricultural activities, lockdown exposure and access to policies and support. The sampling strategy was not designed to obtain a representative sample of the global population of family farmers, as that objective could not be set in the absence of a sample frame with up-to-date listings of family farmers across the world. However, the sampling strategy and documented take-up of the survey has provided a set of results that describe a population of family farmers with some degree of social capital in terms of linkages to producer organizations and to peer networks. Thus, the survey data provide an illustrative overview of the current situation of family farmers around the world, with insights into the profiles of family farmers, the challenges they face in the context of a global pandemic, and the strategies they have adopted in response to that crisis.

A fourth country, Sri Lanka, also implemented the targeted survey of small-scale fisher folk. However, data entry was not yet complete at the time this report was prepared.

Data entry took place from 31 December 2020 until 12 February 2021.

The farmer survey was also implemented in the northeastern semiarid region of Brazil in December 2020, with about 2,000 farmers, with the support of the Semi-Arid Association of Brazil (ASA). The results of that survey are not reported in this brief since it was implemented based on a sample frame of ASA beneficiaries. For more information about this survey, please refer to FAO (2021).

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3 A fourth country, Sri Lanka, also implemented the targeted survey of small-scale fisher folk. However, data entry was not yet complete at the time this report was prepared.
4 Data entry took place from 31 December 2020 until 12 February 2021.
5 The farmer survey was also implemented in the northeastern semiarid region of Brazil in December 2020, with about 2,000 farmers, with the support of the Semi-Arid Association of Brazil (ASA). The results of that survey are not reported in this brief since it was implemented based on a sample frame of ASA beneficiaries. For more information about this survey, please refer to FAO (2021).
2.3 Final sample

A total of 2,842 farmers or small-scale producers took part in the online and in-person surveys, with 2,679 completing the questionnaire. Most respondents come from Asia and the Pacific, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Central Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, North America, and the Near East and North Africa.\textsuperscript{6}

The disproportionate sample size for the Asia-Pacific region is due to the targeted surveys implemented in India, Indonesia and Thailand, which totalled nearly 1,500. As a result, the trends observed in this report largely reflect those respondents. Despite the much smaller sample sizes from other regions, statistics are still disaggregated by geographic region in order to provide insights about the average outcomes among survey participants to the organizations that facilitated their participation (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

\textsuperscript{6} The number of respondents per country in each region, from the maximum to the minimum number, is as follows: Asia and the Pacific: Thailand (1,095), India (787), Indonesia (491), Philippines (159), Nepal (3), Bangladesh (2), Cambodia (2), Afghanistan (1), Australia (1), Lao People’s Democratic Republic (1), Mongolia (1), Myanmar (1), Solomon Islands (1); Latin America and the Caribbean: Brazil (16), Ecuador (15), Honduras (14), Peru (13), Guatemala (12), Costa Rica (8), Colombia (7), Argentina (6), Plurinational State of Bolivia (5), Dominican Republic (5), Nicaragua (5), Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (5), Chile (2), Jamaica (2), Panama (2), Antigua and Barbuda (1), Bahamas (1), El Salvador (1), Haiti (1), Saint Lucia (1), Uruguay (1); Europe and Central Asia: Uzbekistan (34), Kyrgyzstan (17), Spain (14), Kazakhstan (12), Italy (5), Austria (2), Georgia (2), Hungary (2), Andorra (1), Azerbaijan (1), Switzerland (1), Tajikistan (1); sub-Saharan Africa: Democratic Republic of the Congo (8), Uganda (5), Nigeria (4), Cameroon (3), Ghana (2), Guinea (2), Kenya (2), Senegal (2), Togo (2), Zambia (2), Benin (1), Chad (1), Côte d’Ivoire (1), Ethiopia (1), Gambia (1), Niger (1), Somalia (1), United Republic of Tanzania (1); North America: Mexico (30), United States of America (2); Near East and North Africa: Morocco (4), Mauritania (2), Tunisia (2), Algeria (1), Lebanon (1).
The sample is primarily composed of male respondents (65 percent) and the average age is slightly above 46 years. As Figure 2 shows, male respondents are, on average, slightly older than female respondents. Most respondents are affiliated to a producers’ or local organization (86 percent). Among them, most belong to a fishing organization (85 percent), reflecting the targeted surveys in India and Thailand, or a farmer organization (20 percent). Among those affiliated to an organization, slightly more than half belongs to an organization that represents indigenous peoples, 42 percent belongs to a women’s organization and 38 percent belongs to a youth organization (see Figure 3).
FIGURE 2. Respondents, by age group and gender

![Bar chart showing percentage of respondents by age group and gender]

Note: The red line depicts the average age of female respondents. The blue line depicts the average age among male respondents.


FIGURE 3. Respondents affiliated with a producer or local organization (left panel), by type and target group (right panel)

![Bar chart showing percentage of respondents affiliated with different types of organizations]

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.
3.1 Lockdown exposure

Upwards of 80 percent of respondents had experienced a lockdown in the 12 months prior to the survey, and this is true in all the regions. Whereas the share of respondents experiencing lockdowns varies only slightly across regions, the timing and duration varies considerably across regions. Respondents from Africa and from Asia and the Pacific are more likely to have experienced a lockdown prior to the survey, while respondents from Europe and Central Asia and from the United States of America and Latin America are more likely to have experienced a lockdown at the time of the survey. The average lockdown duration is much lower among respondents in Asia and the Pacific (less than 4 months) and ranges from around 5.5 to 6 months among the other regions (see Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4. Respondents experiencing lockdown during the pandemic (left panel) and average lockdown duration (right panel), by region**

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.
Among respondents having experienced some lockdown, 88 percent reported restrictions on food markets in terms of closures or limited operating hours. The same kinds of restrictions were reported, with slightly lower frequency, for input markets (80 percent) and supermarkets (70 percent). Across regions, food markets are consistently more likely to have experienced restrictions than supermarkets.

While over 80 percent of respondents experienced some travel restriction as part of local lockdown measures, slightly more than 40 percent were under travel restrictions at the time of the survey. As Figure 5 illustrates, some regional disparities may be noticed. Market restrictions were somewhat less frequent in Europe and Central Asia and more frequent in Asia and the Pacific. Travel restrictions were less frequent in Europe and Central Asia and more frequent in Africa.

**FIGURE 5. Lockdown market restrictions (left panel) and travel restrictions (right panel), percentage of respondents by region**

![Graph showing market restrictions and travel restrictions by region](image)

Note: This graph reports results for respondents having indicated any exposure to COVID-19 pandemic lockdown policies. Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

### 3.2 Sources of public support

Public policy response to the pandemic expanded tremendously in the months since the onset of the pandemic until the timing of the UNDFF family farmer survey. By December 2020, 215 countries had put in place social protection measures to mitigate the effects of the crisis, amounting to over 1 400 different measures. More than 60 percent of these represented social assistance measures, more than half of which involved cash transfers or social pensions. Other measures implemented included social insurance policies (24 percent) and labour market interventions (14 percent) (Gentilini et al., 2020).

Among family farmers, awareness of support policies and access to support are quite uneven across regions, as shown in Figure 6. In Africa and in the United States of America and Latin America, most respondents were not aware of any financial help (such as postponement of payments, loan or debt cancellation, and the creation of new credit...
lines) or social support put in place by the government in the 6 months prior to the survey. In contrast, in Europe and Central Asia and in Asia and the Pacific, the share of respondents unaware of any financial help or social support was much lower. Beyond awareness, receipt of such support also varies across regions, being lower in Africa and in the United States of America and Latin America; and higher in Asia and the Pacific, where close to 60 percent had received some financial help, and close to 75 percent had received some social support by the time the survey was conducted. Among those who received social support, the major type of social support was cash transfers (80 percent) followed by food transfers (40 percent) and free health care (30 percent). (See Figure 7.)

**FIGURE 6. Awareness and receipt of financial policy support, percentage of respondents by region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>No policy or unaware</th>
<th>Aware but not received</th>
<th>Aware and received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and Central Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America and Latin America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ own elaboration. Financial policy support pertains to public policy for postponing debt payments, cancelling loans/debts, creating new credit lines.

**FIGURE 7. Awareness and receipt of social support, percentage of respondents by region (left panel) and by type of support received (right panel)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Awareness and receipt of social support</th>
<th>Type of social support received (among respondents receiving some social support)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cash transfers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td>Food transfers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and Central Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Free health care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America and Latin America</td>
<td></td>
<td>School feeding programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Child care services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subsidized social security system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>No policy or unaware</th>
<th>Aware but not received</th>
<th>Aware and received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and Central Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America and Latin America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Social support pertains to public policies to help families cope with the loss of livelihood sources and to improve access to public services, such as health and education.

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.
4.1 Agricultural activities

As shown in Figure 8, in terms of agriculture, respondents primarily engage in fishing (71 percent) or crop production (34 percent) and, secondarily, in aquaculture (14 percent) or livestock husbandry (8 percent). However, strong disparities in the production profile of respondents exist across regions of the world (see Figure 9 and Figure 10). While most respondents from Asia and the Pacific specialize in fishing or aquaculture, respondents from all other regions mostly engage in crop or seed production, either solely or in combination with livestock husbandry, pastoralism, apiculture or forestry.
FIGURE 8. Respondents engaged in agriculture, by type of activity

Fishing  
Crop production  
Livestock husbandry  
Aquaculture  
Seed production  
Apiculture  
Pastoralism  
Forestry

Percentage of respondents

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

FIGURE 9. Respondents engaged in agriculture, by region and activity type

Africa  
Apiculture  
Aquaculture  
Crop production  
Fishing  
Forestry  
Livestock husbandry  
Pastoralism  
Seed production

Asia and the Pacific  
Apiculture  
Aquaculture  
Crop production  
Fishing  
Forestry  
Livestock husbandry  
Pastoralism  
Seed production

Europe and Central Asia  
Apiculture  
Aquaculture  
Crop production  
Fishing  
Forestry  
Livestock husbandry  
Pastoralism  
Seed production

United States of America and Latin America  
Apiculture  
Aquaculture  
Crop production  
Fishing  
Forestry  
Livestock husbandry  
Pastoralism  
Seed production

Percentage of respondents

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.
Crop producers predominantly cultivate cereals (69 percent) and fruits and vegetables (36 percent). Roots cultivation is also quite widespread among respondents from all regions, except Asia and the Pacific. The share of crop producers cultivating cash crops is greatest in Africa (29 percent) and in the United States of America and Latin America (21 percent). (See Figure 11 and Figure 12.)
FIGURE 12. Crop groups cultivated, percentage of crop producers by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Cereals</th>
<th>Fruits and vegetables</th>
<th>Roots</th>
<th>Oil crops</th>
<th>Cash crops</th>
<th>Flowers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and Central Asia</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America and Latin America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.
4.2 Agricultural labour

Given the targeting of the survey to family farmers across the world, all respondents reported relying on family labour for their agricultural production activities in the 12 months prior to the survey (see Figure 13). Forty-four percent rely only on family, with no other source of agricultural labour. Thirty percent use agricultural labour provided by friends and hired labour, in addition to family members, and fewer than 15 percent count on two sources of labour, either family and hired labour or family members and labour from friends or a peer network.

Labour constraints at the time of the survey differed considerably according to the source of labour. Producers who only rely on family labour were more likely to have no access at all to any labour at the time of the survey, while farmers who reported the use of all three sources of labour (family, friend and hired labour) were more likely to have reported sufficient access to labour at the time of the survey.

4.3 Access to productive inputs

The survey asked family farmers to report their access to inputs relevant to their production strategy at the time of the survey. Figure 14 indicates that access to inputs is constrained for a significant share of respondents, with fewer than half the producers reporting sufficient access to inputs relevant to their production strategy. Insufficient access at the time of the survey affected between 23 percent of crop producers for pesticides and 44 percent of fisherfolk for fishing gear. Lack of access was reported by between 12 percent of crop producers (for seeds) and 46 percent (for pesticides).

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7 Slightly more than 60 percent of crop producers had used fertilizer or pesticides in the 12 months prior to the survey. For other inputs, past use was not specified in the survey.
The sufficiency of access is closely related to the main modality of access (see Figure 15). Access to fertilizer and pesticides in the 12 months prior to the survey was mostly obtained through commercial suppliers. With 80 percent of respondents having reported input market restrictions, this could explain the insufficient or complete lack of access to fertilizer and pesticides reported by 70 percent of respondents. On the other hand, for seeds, which the majority of crop producers accessed from non-commercial sources, such as their own production and community-based sources, nearly half the respondents indicated sufficient access.

**Note:** For each agricultural activity (crop and seed production, livestock and pastoralism, and fishing and aquaculture) the graph shows the percentage of respondents engaging in this agricultural activity who had sufficient, insufficient or no access to relevant inputs.

**Source:** Authors’ own elaboration.

**FIGURE 14. Level of access to productive inputs, percentage of respondents by agricultural activity**

![Bar chart showing level of access to productive inputs by agricultural activity.

**FIGURE 15. Sources of access to crop inputs, percentage of crop producers by input type**

![Bar chart showing sources of access to crop inputs by type.

**Note:** For each input (seeds, fertilizer and pesticides), the graph shows the percentage of crop producers using this input who accessed the input only through non-commercial sources (own production, public or community sources), only commercial sources (from the market) or both commercial and non-commercial sources.

**Source:** Authors’ own elaboration.
4.4 Access to production services

Production services refer to those services that facilitate producer access to resources or infrastructure that enable the successful realization of the production strategy or value addition. The survey asked farmers to report on their access to post-harvest services, extension services and to liquidity, through borrowing from formal and informal sources.

About 60 percent of producers reported having access to post-harvest services, with the most common services accessed being equipment (53 percent) and processing (44 percent), and, secondarily, storage (32 percent) and distribution (31 percent). However, more than half of these experienced insufficient or no access at the time of the survey.

Extension services were accessed by slightly more than 60 percent of respondents. The public sector served as the most important source of extension for producers, at over 70 percent. NGOs, commercial input suppliers and cooperatives accounted for only around one-fifth of extension support. At the time of the survey, three-fifths of the respondents indicated that their access to extension support was insufficient for meeting the needs of their production activities.

Close to two-thirds of the producers thought they could borrow money if they needed to at the time of the survey. However, 60 percent of these producers indicated that their access to credit or loans was insufficient. Public institutions represent the main source of liquidity, reported by 60 percent of respondents, which contrasts with the only 20 percent who could gain access to loans from a commercial bank. Nearly 30 percent of respondents reported friends, family and neighbours (the peer network) as potential sources of loans (see Figure 16).

FIGURE 16. Respondents by level of access to production services (left panel), type and source of services accessed (right panel)

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

* These refer to contracted services, machines, tools and infrastructure for the storage, processing and distribution of agriculture, fishery and forestry outputs. This includes activities such as threshing, drying, boiling, shelling, milling, hulling and cooling.
4.5 Commercialization strategies

The vast majority of family farmers (more than 80 percent) reported having sold some part of their agricultural production in the 12 months prior to the survey, with no strong disparity across world regions. However, the share of sellers facing sales constraints at the time of the survey (not selling or selling less than expected) varies quite a lot, representing about 40 percent of sellers in Europe and Central Asia but more than 80 percent of sellers in Asia and the Pacific. Regarding markets and channels, sellers sell primarily on local markets (91 percent), directly to consumers (59 percent) or through intermediaries (52 percent). (See Figure 17.)

4.6 Agricultural income

As illustrated in Figure 18, 87 percent of producers reported experiencing a drop in agricultural income in the six months prior to the survey. The share is higher in Asia and the Pacific (90 percent), Africa (85 percent) and in the United States of America and Latin America (68 percent), but considerably lower in Europe and Central Asia (39 percent). Partly reflecting differences across regions, producers who specialize in fishing and aquaculture were more likely to have experienced an income drop.
Figure 19 shows the stability of agricultural income with respect to gender, sales constraints, lockdown exposure and social support. The share of respondents having reported a drop in agricultural income is not differentiated across gender lines. Respondents who were selling without constraints at the time of the survey were less likely to have reported an income drop. In comparison to respondents who never experienced lockdown or who experienced some lockdown in the past, those who were experiencing lockdown at the time of the survey were less likely to have reported an income drop. The share of respondents having experienced an income drop is slightly higher among those who received some social support, which may suggest efficient targeting of such policies.
4.7 Non-farm work

At the time of the survey, 48 percent of respondents reported earning income from some non-agricultural activities (see Figure 20). Five percent were doing more non-farm work than usual, about 10 percent were working the same as usual and 33 percent were working less than usual. The remaining 52 percent were not engaged at all in non-agricultural work at the time of the survey.

The share of respondents working more than usual in non-farm activities is higher in the United States of America and Latin America (25 percent) and Africa (19 percent), while the share of respondents not working at all in non-farm activities is higher in Asia and the Pacific (52 percent) and in Europe and Central Asia (52 percent). Producers who only rely on family labour for their agricultural activities were more likely to not work or work less than usual in non-farm activities, which suggests that non-farm participation was limited due to farm labour needs.

On the other hand, producers reporting agricultural labour from multiple sources are significantly more likely to report income earned from non-agricultural activities. This relation could suggest that income earned from non-agricultural activities facilitates the hiring of labour for agriculture. The trend also suggests that access to multiple sources of agricultural labour facilitates participation in off-farm income-generating activities, by freeing family labour for such work. Neither can be ascertained from the data; however, both channels are potential pathways.

**FIGURE 20. Participation in non-farm work, percentage of respondents by region (left panel) and sources of agricultural labour (right panel)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Agricultural labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>More than normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td>As normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and Central Asia</td>
<td>Less than normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America and Latin America</td>
<td>Does not participate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Agricultural labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only family labour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and friend labour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and hired labour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family, friend and hired labour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.
As shown in Figure 21, producers who did not experience an agricultural income drop in the 6 months prior to the survey were more likely to work more or the same as usual in non-farm activities at the time of the survey. Similarly, producers who sold some part of their production in the 12 months prior to the survey were more likely to work in non-farm activities, even more so if they were selling without constraint at the time of the survey. These trends suggest that diversification of income sources provides some resilience to producer livelihoods.

![FIGURE 21. Participation in non-farm work, percentage of respondents by agricultural income change (left panel) and commercialization profile (right panel)](image)

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.
### 4.8 Risk management strategies

The survey asked about approaches taken by family farmers to adapt their agricultural production strategy. These are varied and can reflect risk mitigation as well as management strategies. These strategies may include changes in production and commercialization decisions, as well as pursuing new sources of liquidity. As shown in Figure 22, in the six months prior to the survey, about 60 percent of respondents adopted some strategies related to their agricultural activities, primarily looking for new sales channels. The search for new sales channels among over 30 percent of respondents reflects the widespread market restrictions experienced by producers, as reported in Section 3.1.

**FIGURE 22. Risk management strategies used in the six months prior to the survey, percentage of respondents by type of strategy**

Note: The graph shows the percentage of respondents who engaged in each risk management strategy in the six months prior to the survey.

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.
The UN Decade of Family Farming was established in 2019 to bring attention to the characteristics, needs and challenges faced by family farmers across the world and to highlight their important role in contributing to global food production. The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 presented a new and unique challenge to family farming of all kinds, including crop, animal, fish and forestry-based production, and underscored the need to better identify the challenges and strategies of family farmers.

The online survey of the Global Consultation, disseminated across continents, piloted an innovative data collection tool, facilitated by the broad reach of family farmer organizations and their networks. The instrument probed for information about COVID-19, public support policies, agricultural production strategies, commercialization mechanisms, income sources and risk management strategies. Notably, challenges experienced in accessing labour, inputs, markets and non-agricultural income sources served as essential reporting items in the survey, as well as the level of income with respect to the usual income prior to the pandemic. Although the pilot survey was not based on a universal sample frame of family farmers – given the absence of any such tool – the widespread implementation of the questionnaire through family farming networks enabled extensive coverage among specific subpopulations, validating the survey instrument in its content and applicability among family farmer populations.
The survey results showed how family farming was impacted by the global pandemic, with over 80 percent of respondents affirming exposure to lockdown policies that limited movement and access to markets. Most respondents believed their income was below the normal level.

Commercialization of agricultural output was notably challenged, with more than two-thirds of respondents indicating constraints faced in commercializing production, reflecting the reporting of widespread implementation of food and input market restrictions in terms of operating hours and overall closures. Those restrictions were also reflected in constraints to accessing productive inputs for crop production, particularly for inputs widely acquired through market purchases. For seeds, however, which were reported as accessed disproportionately through multiple non-commercial modalities (such as own production, community networks and public distribution), fewer respondents expressed access constraints.

This outcome is one of several in the survey results that point to the importance of diversification for sustaining resilient livelihoods. Respondents relying on multiple sources of labour for agriculture were less likely to express labour constraints and more likely to have engaged in non-agricultural activities. Those who reported engaging in both agricultural and non-agricultural activities were also more likely to have sold agricultural production and less likely to have experienced a drop in income.

Strategies for recovery were demonstrably reliant on individual farmer capacity to respond to the crisis, and limited in terms of external sources of support. Except for respondents based in Asia and the Pacific, more than two-thirds of respondents were unaware of or unable to access social assistance to overcome the effects of the pandemic. This, paired with the low level of access to credit, productive inputs, post-harvest services and extension, means that family farmers hold limited means for engaging in swift recovery. The gaps evidenced by the survey can serve to inform the needed areas of support for family farmers, especially when implemented in targeted contexts.

The experience of the farmer survey as part of the Global Consultation revealed a valuable tool for the monitoring of production and risk management strategies among family farmers through direct reporting and quantitative indicators, in the absence of other systematic tools for doing so. Although survey programs already exist to monitor agricultural livelihoods across the world, their samples are not designed to ensure the close monitoring of family farmers at subnational levels, especially since sample frames for stratification in terms of agricultural labour sources are not readily available at scale. For this reason, the Global Consultation is an essential complement to household surveys, by providing a targeted means through which to collect data on family farmers.
The farmer survey of the Global Consultation comes with obvious shortcomings, the main limitation of which is the difficulty in reaching the most vulnerable family farmers – those least likely to be engaged with networks of producer organizations and unlikely to have access to the technology and skills for participating in a self-administered survey. Reaching this group – the poorest of the poor – is a recognized challenge in data collection and targeting efforts. Surmounting this obstacle for enabling the mapping of strategies and challenges faced by family farmers of all types would require taking efforts such as this survey program to the next level. Doing so would imply substantial investment in efficiently and systematically identifying family farmers, including the disenfranchised among them, requiring the coordination of a broader set of actors at national and international levels for supporting such efforts, including civil society and academia. A collaboration between FAO and Duke University is already taking on this major task for mapping fisher folk organizations and populations. However, no similar global efforts have been identified for crop, animal and forestry family farmers.

Instead, the foreseeable and implementable next steps for this survey in the context of the Global Consultation and the UNDFF can occur on multiple fronts, including through:

1. representative surveys of producer organization and civil society organization membership;
2. comprehensive communication campaigns to promote take-up of subsequent waves of the online version of the survey; and
3. the adoption of the instrument by organizations, governments and United Nations agencies, for implementation as part of project monitoring and evaluation efforts, and as part of larger survey programs.

In each of the above instances, consolidating information in order to contribute to a global database regarding family farmers implies the need to consistently apply the questions and modules of the present survey. Ensuring such consistency will facilitate comparisons across countries and contexts and will enable the creation of aggregate indicators for reporting by geographic location, agricultural activity, gender and other categorizations of interest to analysts, policymakers and development practitioners. Implementation along these lines will serve to build and strengthen the base of information for systematizing the monitoring of family farmer livelihoods across the world.
References


Family farmers' and small-scale producers' challenges in the context of COVID-19

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