



FAO requires
USD 24 million



to assist
890 000 people



6.7 million people in need of food security and agriculture assistance. An additional **2.5 million** are at high risk due to COVID-19*



234 509 confirmed cases of COVID-19 (7 July 2020)



57% of the population is economically vulnerable to effects of COVID-19 (Economic Survey of Pakistan 2019-2020)

*Source: Pakistan Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 Pandemic 2020

Impact of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture

Pakistan is highly exposed to natural hazards and shocks, including drought. In 2018-2019, severe drought conditions prevailed in 18 districts of Balochistan and eight districts of Sindh, rendering around 5 million people in need of immediate food security and livelihood assistance. Since March 2019, a desert locust outbreak has also affected around 46 districts across four provinces of Pakistan. These issues make a large proportion of the population vulnerable to persistent and chronic food insecurity.

The COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbating poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, increasing humanitarian needs in disaster prone areas of Pakistan. The average number of daily new cases has been rising sharply since the beginning of June. On 18 June 2020, the Government imposed a “smart lockdown” in several cities to curb the spike in cases. The effects of urgent and essential COVID-19 containment measures are having repercussions on the country’s already fragile employment situation and on livelihoods.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme have jointly conducted food security and nutrition analyses in the wake of COVID-19, to assess its impact on people’s livelihoods and coping mechanisms, agricultural supply chains, market situations and food prices. The most vulnerable groups susceptible to COVID-19 shocks include daily wage labourers (22 percent of all wage earners), internally displaced persons and Temporarily Displaced Persons, refugees, returnees, low income urban households, market-dependent rural households, elderly people, those already suffering from medical conditions, children and female-headed poor households.

Overall, 2020 wheat production is expected to remain close to the five-year average. However, approximately 70 percent of the wheat harvest depends on traditional farm labourers, and COVID-19 containment measures have significantly hindered their ability to move and work during harvest, resulting in production losses. In addition, food supply chains are under stress, with farmers facing lack of inputs (including a shortage of certified seeds and fertilizers), difficulties in obtaining agricultural machinery, availability of jute bags for storage and transport, lack of access to extension services and disruptions in distribution. The ability of markets to supply a diverse range of staples, fruit and vegetables will also vary



greatly throughout the country. Markets in remote and border areas are already beginning to show signs of stress. These factors could reduce access to food for the most vulnerable households.

Livestock owners have also been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Livestock markets were closed until mid-April and the buying/selling of livestock was at a standstill. Additionally, farmers' ability to access animal health services was hampered due to temporary closures of government and private sector extension services. Currently, access to fodder, feed and health services is improving. However, the effects of COVID-19-related transportation restrictions is adversely impacting livestock products and the processing industry, specifically for milk and meat products, which could have detrimental repercussions on small businesses engaged in milk and meat supply chains.

The Government of Pakistan has announced a fiscal stimulus package of PKR 1.2 trillion (around USD 7.2 billion) as part of its immediate response to COVID-19. Fiscal measures by provincial governments include expanding the Ehsaas emergency programme's outreach from 5.2 million to 12 million households, providing a cash grant to 3 million daily wage labourers in the formal sector and providing food assistance to poor families at subsidized rates from utility stores. The Benazir Income Support Programme is supporting 3 million households and the Government has enhanced their monthly stipend from PKR 2 000 (around USD 13) to PKR 3 000 (around USD 20).

Through the State Bank of Pakistan, the Federal Government has adopted measures to safeguard financial stability, expanded refinancing schemes, announced new facilities to support employment, manufacturing, hospitals and medical centres, and relaxed the conditions of export refinancing and long-term financing schemes.

Likely evolution of the impacts of COVID-19 on food security

COVID-19 cases are expected to continue to rise, reaching its peak by the end of July or August. It is feared that the combined effects of COVID-19, the recent desert locust infestation and other natural hazards may exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities. Furthermore, if the spread of COVID-19 continues to accelerate, resulting in prolonged lockdowns, the number of additional people at risk of becoming food insecure could increase. The main anticipated effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security and agriculture are the following:

- **The 2020/21 winter cropping season and 2020 rice season to be affected by the compounded impacts of COVID-19 and flooding.** Given a shortage of certified seeds, fertilizers and other agricultural inputs, the most vulnerable farming households might not have the required inputs for the upcoming 2020/21 Rabi season that is likely to begin in October–December. Numerous farmers may be unable to sow crops or have to resort to negative coping mechanisms to meet their crop input needs. Should essential health-related COVID-19 containment measures remain in place, limited movement of labour and high input prices could affect agricultural activities.
- **Economic impact to affect purchasing power of the most vulnerable.** Real gross domestic product growth is projected to contract by 1.3 percent in fiscal year (FY) 2020 (from 1 July 2019 and ending on 30 June 2020) and growth will remain muted in FY 2021. Fruit and vegetable growers are especially vulnerable as perishable items cannot be stored. Small livestock herders are also particularly vulnerable. Reported localized price increases of wheat grain and flour as well as other important food items, such as chicken, meat, milk and onions could continue as long as COVID-19 containment measures are in place. As a result, the purchasing power of the most vulnerable is likely to be significantly affected over the remainder of the year, with potential repercussions on food security and nutrition.

Anticipatory actions and response

Within the framework of FAO's Corporate COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, the proposed actions have been identified to meet the urgent short-term needs of the most vulnerable food-insecure populations in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh. It also represents FAO's contribution to the United Nations Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19.

With re-programmed resources from other emergency and resilience projects in Pakistan, FAO has been able to follow COVID-19 guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) in all field operations; review agricultural extension modalities and protocols to comply with hygiene/safety measures; provide technical support to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Agriculture Department in identifying projects for adaptation of good agricultural practices and suitable technologies to uplift the agriculture sector; provide 1 400 personal protective equipment kits to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority for use by health professionals; disseminate SOPs and messages on the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 transmission risks to 90 000 farmers through farmer field schools; and support the National Ministry of Food and Research with preparing radio programmes on COVID-19 awareness for farmers.

FAO also aims to implement the following activities to support the food security, nutrition and livelihoods of vulnerable households affected by the COVID-19 pandemic:

1) Ensuring availability of and stabilizing access to food for the most food-insecure populations

- Distribute agricultural inputs to smallholder farmers, covering both *Kharif* and upcoming *Rabi* crops, especially rice, millet, sorghum, maize, pulses, cotton, fodder, wheat, perennial orchards and summer vegetables.
- Support livestock owners through the provision of livestock vaccinations and medication for foot-and-mouth disease, *peste des petits ruminants* or other major diseases, along with the provision of nutritious feed, fodder and capacity building on livestock health and disease prevention.
- Provide female-headed households with

poultry birds, small ruminants (goat/sheep) and kitchen-gardening support packages.

- Implement cash-for-work programmes, through the improvement of farmer-managed water courses, to create employment opportunities, while constructing small-scale dual-purpose water reservoirs, retaining walls and bioengineering structures and plantations, as well as carrying out soil erosion control measures e.g. checking dams.
- Distribute inputs combined with unconditional cash transfers (cash+) to support vulnerable households whose purchasing power has been affected by COVID-19 containment measures or in areas where COVID-19 mitigation measures and the desert locust upsurge have resulted in insufficient harvests.
- Provide localized nutrition-sensitive food production, food utility and nutrition assistance to vulnerable households, to address widespread malnutrition that is set to exacerbate due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2) Ensuring continuity of the food supply chain

- Monitor the food security and nutrition situation regularly, in close collaboration with United Nations (UN) partners, for informed decision-making, and to advocate on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition.
- Distribute equipment and provide training to vulnerable farmers to improve farming practices, storage, processing, marketing capacities and reduce post-harvest losses.
- Provide packing material for cereal and vegetable crops, to reduce post-harvest losses in transportation to markets. Additionally, FAO will facilitate harvesting by supporting farmers with threshing and ploughing of cereal crops.
- Provide technical support to the Government in designing and implementing stimulus packages (including interest free loans and grants) for vulnerable groups, especially female farmers.
- Facilitate farmers' access to markets through electronic platforms, for better selling of their produce.
- Create market linkages between farmers/female producer groups, input suppliers and other market actors.

- Promote integrated water resource management and water conservation techniques for local transformation of agriculture and improved natural resource management; and provide capacity development for the Government and other stakeholders on climate-resilient agriculture and water management practices.

3) Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of transmission

- Implement awareness-raising campaigns on health and safety measures to reduce the risk of virus

transmission at the local level, targeting all actors in key agriculture value chains.

- Promote SOPs and protection standards among farmers, producers, transporters and agricultural suppliers, through farmer field schools, livestock field schools, animal health clubs and other networks.
- Raise awareness in rural farming communities using mobile technology and networks of farmer field schools, to ensure vulnerable farmers have access to information to protect themselves and others from COVID-19 during their routine fieldwork.

Funding



FAO requires
USD 24 million
under the Global Humanitarian
Response Plan for COVID-19



to assist
890 000 people

FUNDING GAP

USD 16 million

66.7%



33.3%

RECEIVED

USD 8 million

Resource partners

the European Union,
the Government of
the United States
of America and the
United Nations Office
for the Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs

Coordination and partnerships

- FAO is working closely with the Government of Pakistan at all levels, particularly the institutions involved in response, recovery and rehabilitation.
- FAO is also coordinating and collaborating with the Food Security and Agriculture Working Group partners, UN agencies and civil society organizations both at federal and provincial levels.

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