



Economic Inclusion and social protection to reduce poverty Rural women's economic empowerment

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The issue

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, most countries are adopting containment measures to control the spread of the virus. These measures pose particularly daunting challenges for rural women. They are often the guardians of household food security, on top of playing leading roles as agricultural producers, farm managers, processors, traders, wage workers and entrepreneurs. Rural women often depend on informal, short-term or part-time jobs, with low earnings, limited or no social security, and a high degree of vulnerability to economic downturns. COVID-19 has aggravated their situation and their capacity to cope is being squeezed by their limited access to inputs, services and financial resources. With restrictive measures in place in many countries, women's workload is increasing as a result of school closures and the need to care for older and sick household members.

The sociocultural norms and practices that underpin household gender inequalities mean women and girls often suffer reduced food quality and quantity in a crisis. Moreover, household tensions due to mandatory stay-at-home orders are increasing the risk of gender-based violence against women and girls, as documented in several countries. Gender-based inequalities also mean rural women risk being ignored in COVID-19 responses, though their full engagement is critical to the recovery of agrifood systems and to building more resilient rural livelihoods. Evidence from crises situations suggests that narrowing the gender gap in rural areas is crucial to strengthening countries' capacity to rebound with more equitable and sustainable growth.

The action

This programme will mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on rural women and girls, helping to reduce gender inequalities in agriculture and food systems and paving the way for accelerated social and economic empowerment for women. This will involve four interconnected actions:

- 1 Enhancing gender-sensitive measures to reduce rural women's vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition, providing technical support for the design and implementation of gender-sensitive social protection interventions. As a longer-term measure, the programme will assist in establishing innovative home food-production programmes to equip rural women and men with the knowledge and resources to produce and consume nutritious foods.
- 2 Fostering rural women's income-generating capacity, productive potential and resilience to COVID-19-related economic shocks, by promoting measures and strategies to enhance rural women's access to income generation, finance and markets, with specific attention to agribusinesses and labour-saving technologies and practices.

Budget

USD 5 to 10 million
(Budget will affect the scale of interventions)

Time frame

2020–2023

SDGs



Related FAO policy notes on COVID-19

- [Gendered Impacts of Covid-19 and Equitable Policy Responses in Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition](#)



- 3 Investing in women's leadership in formal and informal rural organizations to ensure that rural women and their organizations are enabled to engage and articulate their needs in the design and implementation of the response and mitigation strategies to COVID-19. This will build on existing good practices, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Dimitra Clubs approach.
- 4 Protecting rural women and girls against gender-based violence and promoting positive changes in gender relations, social norms and behavioural patterns, using various gender-transformative approaches to reduce gender-based conflict as a driver of gender-based violence. The programme will assist individuals and groups most at risk of gender-based violence through livelihood, economic and life-skills support.

Expected results

- 1 Rural women's food security and nutrition will be shielded from the impact of COVID-19.
- 2 The income-generating capacity and productive potential of rural women will be enhanced.
- 3 Rural women's participation and leadership in the COVID-19 response at community, organizational and policy level will be strengthened.
- 4 Programmatic and policy-oriented measures will be adopted to address gender-based violence.

Partnerships

The International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Programme, UN Women, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Care USA, the International Food Policy Research Institute, governments, producer organizations, informal groups such as the Dimitra Clubs, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, researchers and funding partners.

Programme links

The programme will build synergies with FAO's Hand-in-Hand initiative, other FAO COVID-19 response programmes and gender projects. It will tie in with FAO's rural poverty reduction programme, the Forest and Farm Facility, the United Nations "Accelerating rural women's economic empowerment" joint programme and the Multipartner Programme Support Mechanism on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition.

Country focus

Africa: Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, the Niger, Rwanda, Senegal

Asia and the Pacific: India, Nepal

Europe and Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan

Latin America: Guatemala

Contacts

Resource Mobilization and Private Sector Partnerships Division (PSR) – Partnerships and Outreach
PSR-Director@fao.org

Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equity Division – Economic and Social Development
ESP-Director@fao.org

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
 Italy, Rome

