



Boosting smallholder resilience for recovery

© FAO

The issue

Smallholder farmers, who are mostly family farmers in Asia and the Pacific account for more than 70 percent of the world's 510 million small farms, contribute to 36 percent of the world's food and produce the region's 80 percent of milk and 80-90 percent of aquaculture. Yet, many of them are among the region's 400 million extreme poor and the almost one billion people who experience moderate or severe food insecurity. Furthermore, male outmigration has led to a gradual feminization and aging of agriculture workers, increased risk of child labour to fill the labour shortage. Globally, women contribute up to 85 percent of the work on farms but receive barely 20 percent of the family's farming income.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely affects smallholders who face persistent challenges, such as limited access to quality inputs, credit and market; natural resources degradation, land and tenure insecurity, inability to meet stringent food safety and quality standards for diversification toward higher value products, and rising multiple risks (of natural hazards, climate change, pest and diseases as well as conflict).

With income drop, lack of credit and restricted movements, many smallholders are not in a position to buy the necessary inputs or have to resort to prioritizing buying food today over planting seeds for tomorrow. This puts the next season's crop at risk and leads to food shortages, as seen through a sharp decline in demand for seed. In a survey of seed companies in the region, 93 percent reported a drop in demand for vegetable seed and about 75 percent reported declining demand for flower seed. In addition, disruptions to the food supply chain, combined with lack of storage and cooling facilities, have resulted in large amounts of produce being left unharvested or wasted. Restrictions such as those that stopped livestock movements and trade from Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) and Cambodia to China have left many smallholders in these countries unable to sell their livestock. Small fish farmers and traders, a large portion of them are women, suffered business losses because they could not sell their fish or were forced to sell at low prices due to a high volume of fish sales dependent on tourism and exports.

Shortage of labour also occurred during harvest season, including for the non-timber forest products collection period. Additionally, return of millions migrants put additional pressure on remittance dependent livelihoods, further impacting food security and natural resources. Rapid land diversification occurs for immediate food self-sufficiency. While benefiting food security in the short to medium term, this has triggered a sudden increase in groundwater extraction and consumption. Consequently, local water security is declining. Exploitation of forests and other natural resources is also rising threatening the region's already degraded ecosystems.

As the pandemic evolves, the region has been hit by a locust outbreak, cyclones, floods and transboundary diseases such fall army worm, while not yet recovered from the impacts of African swine fever and previous disasters such as the drought in Afghanistan.

Budget

USD 80 million

Time frame

Jan 2020 – Dec 2024

SDGs



Related FAO policy notes on COVID-19

- ▶ Impacts of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture in Asia-Pacific
- ▶ Food supply chain and trade disruptions in Asia under COVID-19: A Regional analysis with policy response options
- ▶ Social protection for COVID-19 response and recovery in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)



The action

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will support countries to plan and implement transformative COVID-19 recovery programmes with resilience of smallholders at the centre. Actions will address the underlying challenges to smallholders while contributing to “Building sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns” – which is one of the six priority pathways to accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the region.

The programme will support smallholders ensure their food security and nutrition and enhance resilient livelihoods through measures that are safe (reducing disease transmission among communities), green (nature friendly and low carbon), equitable (socially inclusive and gender-sensitive, providing job and income for smallholders and healthy diets for all) and resilient (informed by risks, preventing and preparing for future shocks). These principals will guide FAO program of action to support boosting smallholders' resilience.

To support smallholders, the programme incorporates a suite of complementary, COVID-19 sensitive and locally appropriate interventions in three areas:

1 Safeguard livelihoods of the most vulnerable households

The programme will target the most vulnerable smallholder families (including the poor and near poor, casual labourers and families with returned, un-employed migrant workers), who are not covered under COVID-19 humanitarian response, but are at high risk of food insecurity or being pushed back to poverty. Priorities will be given to such households in fragile and conflict-affected areas, countries affected by multiple crises, the region's remaining 12 least developed countries (LDCs) of which 4 are landlocked and 21 Small Islands Developing States (SIDS). Actions would include one or more of the following depending on the context and priority needs with priorities given to women and female-headed households:

- ▶ *Support production capacity of the most vulnerable and COVID-19 affected households* in target regions through cash+ approaches to address their immediate household needs (through unconditional cash transfers) while providing productive assets, inputs and training to restore and sustain their livelihoods. This will scale up FAO's successful cash+ agriculture inputs and training on climate smart agriculture (CSA) and other resilient practices (such as disaster-proof post-harvest storage), behaviour change communication on nutrition as well as COVID-19 safety measures and provision of protective equipment. Training and technology transfer will focus on home gardening, cash crops and small-scale livestock and aquaculture, to improve availability of and access to nutritious food, to generate income and promote resilient and sustainable agriculture practices.
- ▶ *Build capacity of vulnerable smallholders to join/form producer groups, women business schools or community forest groups* for peer learning, scaling up the adoption of CSA/resilient practices and collective marketing of products;
- ▶ *Promote targeted programmes* such as public green procurement of community non-timber forest products (NTFPs), school feeding or public canteens programmes that source smallholders products while incentivizing their adoption of sustainable practices and improvement of food safety and quality;
- ▶ *Linked with the programme on economic inclusion and poverty reduction, promote linkages with Government cash transfer and other stimulus measures* (such as subsidized loan) to scale up successful cash+ approaches to safeguarding livelihoods of the most vulnerable and nutrition of pregnant and lactating women and children under 2 years of age.

2 Promote transformative economic recovery through smallholders' transition toward resilient and sustainable agriculture and community-based ecosystem restoration and sustainable natural resources management

The programme will address the underlying challenges to smallholders' transition to resilient and sustainable agriculture tailored to specific local situations. Actions will target job and income for smallholders, including women-headed households, youth and returned migrants, through promoting community-based ecosystem restoration, sustainable natural resources management and development of green infrastructures. Specifically, envisaged actions will include:

- ▶ **Enhancing smallholders' access to resources for sustainable adoption of CSA/resilient practices and to markets for diversification of livelihoods:**
 - support local infrastructure and services and community-based approaches to increase smallholders' sustainable access to agriculture inputs such as community seed bank, gene bank, community-nursery and others;
 - improve smallholder tenure security through formal (legislation) and informal measures that are proven successful (such as signing informal tenancy agreements or community land delimitation), ensuring gender equality and rights of ethnic communities;
 - enhance smallholders, particularly women access to finance including bridging them with COVID-19 stimulus measures (such as credit at reduced interest). Actions will also facilitate financial institutions' use of climate and disaster risk and agriculture information and build their confidence in smallholders' improved practices to design better financial products for smallholders, leveraging digital innovations;



- support integration of smallholders in value chain development of high quality products through improved business linkages of smallholder producer groups and farmer associations with value chain actors including agreements for private sector' financing along the value chain.

▶ **Promoting community-based ecosystem restoration, sustainable natural resources management and green infrastructures as part of transformative COVID-19 economic recovery**

- support the design and implementation of COVID-19 recovery targeted public work programmes for ecosystem restoration and sustainable natural resources management such as forest restoration, urban and peri-urban forestry, conservation and sustainable management of agro-sylvo-pastoral and natural ecosystems, etc. FAO successful models such as community forestry or certification and standards to incentivize/reinforce sustainable forest management will be scaled up;
- promote green infrastructures (such as bio-engineering water retention and water harvesting structures, embankment by vegetation) and skill development for smallholders to participate in the construction
- provide job and income through cash for work in the implementation of the above-mentioned public work programmes, particularly for the landless, casual labourers and un-employed returned migrant workers, ensuring participation of women and their equal wage.

3 Strengthen community and local institutions capacities for multiple risk management

The programme will support vulnerable communities, local government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to strengthen capacities and institutional system to manage multiple risks (including health risks) to agriculture, livelihoods and food security.

- ▶ strengthen multiple hazard risk monitoring, forecast and early warning systems for agriculture sectors to enable adaptive/risk reduction actions by farmers/smallholders, including linking different sectors (hydro-meteorological services, agriculture, health, etc.), better integrating pest, disease and epidemic risks into existing natural hazard monitoring and forecasting, producing and disseminating location and sub-sector specific agro-meteorological advisories to trigger farmers/smallholders' timely adaptive and anticipatory actions;
- ▶ support communities and local authorities integrate health risks into community-based disaster risk management plans that include the FAO's proven locally appropriate and gender-sensitive Anticipatory Action approach;
- ▶ linked with the programme on food system transformation, strengthen local capacities (of agriculture and other related sectors) to mainstream multi-hazard risk (including pandemic risk) management and climate change adaptation in agriculture policies and plans.

Expected results

- ▶ most vulnerable and COVID-19 affected smallholders supported to recover their agriculture and food-based livelihoods, improve production capacity and income for sustainable food security and nutrition;
- ▶ smallholders and communities empowered and capacitated to move towards climate smart, agro-ecological and nutrition-sensitive agriculture and sustainable natural resources management through an inclusive and transformative COVID-19 recovery process;
- ▶ improved capacities of smallholders, communities and local institutions to manage multiple-hazard risks and build resilience and promote the role of resilient and sustainable agriculture in achieving the SDGs.





Partnerships

Ministries of agriculture (including livestock, fisheries); of forestry, natural resources and environment and of social development; disaster risk management and climate change agencies; United Nations (UN) agencies (the World Food Programme, UN Children's Fund, World Health Organization, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, among others); international financial organizations (the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank); development partners; farmers' and producers' organizations, non-governmental organizations; community-based organizations; the private sector; regional bodies such as ASEAN and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Programme links

The programme is aligned with national policies and strategies and complements COVID-19 recovery plans and stimulus packages. It is in line with FAO country programme frameworks in focus countries and FAO regional priorities. It contributes to regional/sub-regional intergovernmental cooperation frameworks such as the ASEAN COVID-19 recovery plan. It also connects with FAO's components of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19.

Regional and country coverage

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines as "hot spots" of food insecurity and also countries targeted under the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 to address the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Timor-Leste, and Small Islands Developing States (SIDS).

Contact

FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
RAP-ADG@fao.org

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Bangkok, Thailand

