



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 in food crises

April–December 2020

FAO's component of the Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan



Executive summary

Since late 2019 early 2020, an outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) – an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus – has rapidly spread across the world, devastating lives and livelihoods. As of late March 2020, the full impact of the virus on food security and agricultural food systems is not yet known, nor will likely be known, for months to come as the spread of the virus continues to evolve differently by continent and by country. What is clear is that it will have, and is already having, significant negative effects on people along the food supply chain – from producers to processors, marketers, transporters and consumers. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is particularly concerned about the potential impacts of the virus and related containment efforts on food security and livelihoods in contexts of high vulnerability and where populations are already experiencing food crises.

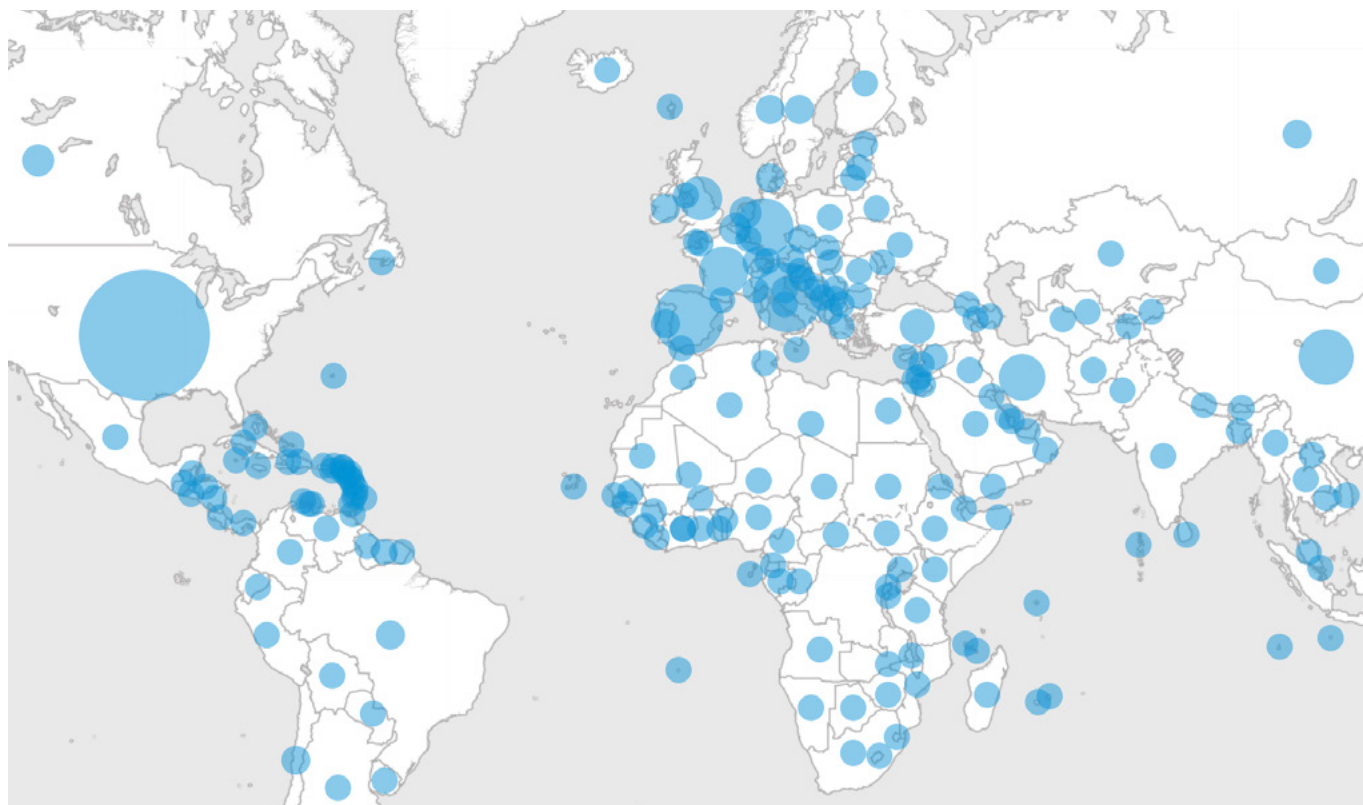
Experience from previous crises, particularly from the Ebola virus disease outbreak in West Africa in 2014, has indicated the significant impact of movement restrictions and disease containment efforts on food production and access, and the importance of maintaining and upscaling humanitarian food security interventions for the most vulnerable populations, alongside the health sector's efforts to avert disease spread.

Within the framework of the United Nations (UN) Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan, FAO has reviewed its ongoing humanitarian/resilience programming and analysed the potential impacts of the virus in order to ensure continued support to the most vulnerable and anticipatory actions to address the secondary effects of the virus.

As such, FAO is seeking **USD 110 million to maintain the provision of critical assistance where there are already high levels of need, while meeting new needs emerging from the effects of COVID-19**. Within the Plan, FAO's efforts will focus on four main activities:

- setting up a **global data facility** – in close collaboration with key partners such as the World Food Programme (WFP), the global Food Security Cluster and the Global Network Against Food Crises Partnership Programme – to support analysis, and inform assessments and programming in contexts already experiencing humanitarian crises (**USD 10 million**);
- **stabilizing incomes and access to food** as well as preserving ongoing livelihood and food production assistance for the most acutely food-insecure populations (**USD 60 million**);
- **ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations**, including between rural, peri-urban and urban areas through support to the sustained functioning of local food markets, value chains and systems, focusing on vulnerable smallholder farmers and food workers as well as areas that are critical to the food supply for vulnerable urban areas (**USD 30 million**); and
- ensuring people along the food supply chain are **not at risk of COVID-19 transmission** by raising awareness about food safety and health regulations, including rights, roles and responsibilities of workers, together with national authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO) (**USD 10 million**).

Current spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (as of 7 April 2020).



Source: World Health Organization, COVID-19 dashboard. Retrieved 7 April 2020. Conforms to UN World map, February 2019.

Crisis overview

Current situation

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus that was first identified at the end of 2019. As of early April 2020, WHO was reporting a continued steep rise in the number of cases and deaths worldwide, with the pandemic spreading to at least 240 countries and territories.

Although the impact of COVID-19 on short- and long-term food security is difficult to predict, some risk factors can be identified and lessons from previous pandemics (e.g. Ebola virus disease (EVD) in West Africa in 2014) or global crises (e.g. food prices crisis of 2008) indicate that effects on food security could be rapid and of dramatic proportions.

While the COVID-19 pandemic is devastating lives, public health systems, livelihoods and economies across the world, populations living in food crisis contexts are particularly exposed to its effects.

The latest figures from the forthcoming *2020 Global Report on Food Crises* are expected to show a further rise in the number of people that were acutely food insecure in 2019 (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 3+), with the majority living in contexts of conflict, climate change and economic turbulence. COVID-19 risks further escalating these figures, with likely huge rises in humanitarian needs and food insecurity as a consequence of both the pandemic itself and containment efforts.

Currently, countries with high levels of acute food insecurity have not yet seen propagation of the virus at the scale at which it is spreading in some other parts of the world. This is likely to at least partly reflect national and local capacities to detect and report cases, and the situation could quickly change, as has been the case in other countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic is already directly affecting food systems through impacts on food supply and demand, and indirectly through decreases in purchasing power, the capacity to produce and distribute food, and the intensification of care tasks, all of which will have differentiated impacts and will more strongly affect the poor and vulnerable.

Countries with existing humanitarian crises are particularly exposed to the effects of the pandemic, in terms of both direct impacts on people's health and lives where health systems are already weak and overburdened and malnutrition levels are high, and indirect effects such as disruption of livelihoods, food supply chains and access to food, basic services as well as humanitarian assistance.

In food crisis contexts, needs are already extremely high and basic service delivery is poor. Movement restrictions necessary to contain the spread of the virus simultaneously threaten to disrupt the entire food supply chain – from production to processing, packaging, transporting, marketing and consumption – as well as livestock movements, which are critical for pastoralists' survival. This would leave already vulnerable populations facing a growing reality of even further constrained access to food due to shortages, high food prices and curtailed incomes. Labour shortages could further disrupt the food supply chain, while informal labourers will be hard hit by job and income losses. **The lessons from the 2014 EVD outbreak in West Africa are clear: while health needs are an urgent and primary concern, we cannot neglect livelihoods and food security-related impacts or we will face deepening humanitarian crises in countries already on the brink.**

Similarly, **slow-downs or reductions in the delivery of humanitarian assistance could be catastrophic in these contexts.** The pandemic will likely have significant repercussions on humanitarian operations, in particular on budgets, as resources may be reprogrammed to support COVID-19 efforts; on logistics, as movement restrictions will hamper both staff and delivery; and leading to rising humanitarian delivery costs (costs of food assistance may also increase in case of any increases in the cost of cereals). This would result in an increase in the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance, while posing an enormous challenge in terms of the ability of governments and organizations to address those needs.

It is therefore crucial to rapidly mobilize and pre-empt COVID-19 impacts on food security in food crisis countries. FAO is thus pursuing a two-pronged approach: maintaining and securing existing critical humanitarian operations; and anticipatory actions to safeguard livelihoods and protect the critical food supply chain to mitigate the secondary effects of the pandemic.

Lessons from previous crises

The full impacts of COVID-19 on food security are difficult to predict and will be context-specific. However, lessons can be learned from past crises which are important to bear in mind today.

The 2014 West Africa EVD outbreak had important implications for food security in that region. The measures to contain the outbreak – in particular the quarantines and restrictions to public gatherings and movements of goods and persons – disrupted agricultural market supply chains, and many farmers were unable to grow or sell crops due to lack of inputs and labour. These factors considerably impacted food production. For example in Liberia, 47 percent of farmers reported they were unable to cultivate farmland due to the outbreak. Furthermore, travel restrictions and suspension of operations of periodic markets disrupted trade flows of food commodities and other necessities. Due to the disruption of markets, in particular international flows due to border controls, there were shortages of goods on the market and this led to an increase in prices of key commodities.

The impact of the EVD outbreak on food security was primarily through reduced access to food. This was mostly the result of higher food prices, and the reduction in economic activity both at the regional and national levels, and at the household level, which had an effect on households' purchasing power. Learning from this, it is clear that investing in safeguarding livelihoods and food production and access at the very onset of the crisis will be critical to mitigate the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and related containment efforts. This will also have a high return of investment in terms of securing food access and reducing the need for sustained food assistance.

Another key lesson from the EVD response was the importance of acknowledging and addressing – early on – the humanitarian impacts of the crisis.

In today's crisis, while the priority is to support public health actors' efforts to contain the spread of the disease, we must be proactive in anticipating COVID-19 collateral effects by protecting the livelihoods and food access of the most vulnerable people, particularly those in food crisis contexts. The health and food security objectives are closely intertwined. When people's livelihoods and incomes are decimated, they are less able to cope with other shocks, such as extended hospital stays or the death of family members, which leave them even more exposed and vulnerable. As access to nutritious food declines, so too will their health, leaving them even more at risk of the worst effects of the disease.

It is also worth noting the impact of the food prices crisis in 2007–2008, when the number of undernourished people in the world increased by 75 million, reaching a total of 923 million. The number increased by an additional 40 million people in 2008, to 963 million. Much of this was attributed to the exponential growth in world food prices. Critically, the crisis also generated political and economic instability and social unrest in both poor and developed nations alike.

Once world prices began to rise, immediate market and policy responses such as panic buying and export restrictions contributed to a further increase in inflationary pressure. The negative impacts on net buyers of food (including small-scale producers) were enormous. Poorer net food importing countries – including island nations such as Haiti, countries in conflict, and rice-importing areas of West Africa – were among the first to feel the effect of rising world food prices. However, high food prices were also recorded as having a serious impact on poor consumers in net food exporting areas. While today's situation is not comparable, as harvests have been good and the outlook for staple crops is promising, the collateral global effects of COVID-19 could have important adverse effects through agricultural labour shortages and if countries start adopting protectionist policies such as tariffs and export bans. This could artificially increase food prices despite current availability because of the pressure on the supply chain.

In addition, when disease events hit, the livestock sector often suffers significant economic losses, with consequences for food security – especially in countries whose economy is heavily dependent on the sector. In the case of H1N1 influenza pandemic, for instance, the mere public perception of risk resulted in significant reductions in exports of pork meat from producing countries (e.g. Mexico). Similarly, consumer response to the increasing incidence of avian influenza dampened demand and prices for poultry in 2005–2006. Consumers shifted to other livestock products, the output of which grew but did not compensate for the slowing growth rate in poultry for developing countries. In the case of COVID-19, limitations imposed on the animal-human interface may have negative consequences for livestock production and related livelihoods.



Food security implications in humanitarian contexts

In countries already affected by existing shocks, including political instability and conflict, a COVID-19 outbreak could prove much more difficult to control and might potentially further exacerbate tensions. This includes, in particular, countries currently affected by conflict, desert locust outbreaks or economic crises. An additional layer of COVID-19 impacts will add to the challenges that these areas are already facing and is likely to further increase the number of vulnerable people. Due to access constraints and the limitations of the health sector capacity, the disease could spread much faster and have more severe impacts, which will be difficult to diagnose and contain. Disruptions to supply chains and a decrease in access to items of first necessity could result in increased competition over limited resources. Price spikes, economic instability and fear as the pandemic spreads could also increase levels of social tension.

With humanitarian costs soaring, supporting food production and related value chain during crises is a cost-effective means to rapidly increase and sustain food availability, while protecting the agriculture-based livelihoods on which the majority of crisis-hit people rely. Food security and livelihood interventions save lives, safeguard livelihoods and contribute to strengthening resilience in the face of future crises. Investing in local food systems provides people with a means to continue surviving even in the midst of disaster.

FAO's approach to anticipating the humanitarian consequences of COVID-19 is based on an analysis of the pandemic's potential impacts and implications for food security.

Movement restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic could derail agricultural input supply chains at critical times in the season, reduce informal labourers' access to farmlands and therefore both their wages and the area of land cultivated.

Impact of containment measures

In countries already facing food crises, any further disruptions to food production and related value chain, for example in the form of reduced availability of critical inputs or restricted access to lands or markets, could be catastrophic for vulnerable populations. Movement restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic could derail agricultural input supply chains at critical times in the season, reduce informal labourers' access to farmlands and therefore both their wages and the area of land cultivated, and constrain transport of goods to processing facilities and/or markets. Livestock supply chains could also be hit by the pandemic, with significant implications for pastoralist households, while vulnerable fishing communities could find access to markets particularly difficult. These would translate into significant income losses and therefore also purchasing power, undermining nutrition and overall resilience in the face of the health emergency.

Food supply chains

COVID-19 has the potential to severely disrupt critical food supply chains, including between rural and urban areas. Movement or import/export restrictions may result in challenges to transport key food items and access processing units and markets, affecting both producers and consumers. This can lead to reduced farmers' incomes and instability of food prices deviating from geographical and seasonal patterns, thus creating uncertainty for both producers and consumers.

This is likely to have significant adverse effects in particular on the most vulnerable actors, such as informal labourers, vulnerable urban populations, displaced populations and others that rely heavily on the market to meet their food needs. Reduced or lost wages, unstable prices, and haphazard availability of essential food items would have serious implications for acute food security and malnutrition levels in these populations.

Food price increases and social tension

Instability generated by an outbreak and associated behavioural changes could result in temporary food shortages, price spikes, and disruption to markets. Such price rises would be felt most by vulnerable populations who depend on markets for their food as well as those already depending on humanitarian assistance to maintain their livelihoods and food access.

Food price spikes can also lead to social tensions and conflict. Higher prices create or increase economic constraints which can fuel sentiments of (perceived) deprivation that in turn can lead to conflict. The impact of the price rises and consequent social effects varies between countries, depending in part on the sensitivity of local markets to global price movements as well as to the degree to which countries are dependent on food imports.

Migration

The agriculture sector plays an important role in influencing migratory patterns. Transhumant pastoral populations are likely to be hard hit by any border closures, as they rely on seasonal movements of livestock for their



food and income. The disruption of traditional transhumance patterns and the creation of new ones may lead to tensions and even violent conflicts between resident and pastoralist communities, resulting in local displacement, and increased levels of poverty and food insecurity. In addition, risk of youth enrolment in extremist groups cannot be ruled out as a negative coping mechanism in these contexts. The impact on these communities is of particular concern in the Sahel as the lean season nears.

In addition, if food supply chains become disrupted and livelihoods untenable, vulnerable populations are more likely to move in search of assistance – especially in fragile contexts and remote areas where movement restrictions may be much more difficult to control. Such movements would further threaten to spread the virus, heighten social tensions, provoke displacement, and undermine livelihoods.

The impacts of the crisis will affect displaced communities differently, depending on their migratory or working status. If response measures are not adequately designed, many risk remaining unprotected and vulnerable to exploitation, poverty and food insecurity. Different typology of migrants (e.g. refugees; internally displaced persons (IDPs); migrant workers; internal or international; permanent, temporary or seasonal; documented or undocumented) will have different access to work, social protection programmes, recovery measures and healthcare systems. The economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to impact not only migrants, but also their families in countries of origin through a sudden dramatic reduction or sudden halt in remittance flows; this could have a particularly acute impact on refugee camps and countries that heavily rely on remittances for food security and nutrition.

Uncertainty of future impacts of the pandemic combined with restrictions on movement, soaring unemployment, limited access to food, and the erosion of already fragile livelihoods may generate discontent among the population, fuelling violence and conflict.

Social tensions and conflict

COVID-19 could also have negative effects on social and political stability, creating the conditions for unrest especially in the most vulnerable food crisis countries. Uncertainty of future impacts of the pandemic combined with restrictions on movement, soaring unemployment, limited access to food, and the erosion of already fragile livelihoods may generate discontent among the population, fuelling violence and conflict.

Furthermore, the postponement of elections may jeopardize the democratic process and generate tensions between ruling parties and oppositions, with possible consequences for political stability. Any COVID-19 response needs to consider in that technical interventions will be understood through local conflict sensibilities, and need to be conflict-sensitive to ensure trust of local populations.

Crises can also be used as an opportunity for military and political gains in ongoing conflicts. Indeed, how crisis response is delivered, and how it can enable other agendas, can become independent conflict accelerants, as can perceptions of bias in terms of which communities' needs are viewed as being prioritized. Finally, the disease could hinder international mediation efforts for conflict resolution, as well as peacekeeping operations, with consequent negative effects on vulnerable and food insecure conflict-affected people. All these impacts may further increase the numbers of IDPs and refugees, which are already of concern in food crisis countries. However, it is important to note that moments of crisis can also provide turning points in a conflict, depending on how the parties behave and whether peace actors can seize opportunities for collaboration.

Deepen existing vulnerabilities

The combination of the above impacts could potentially deepen the already high vulnerabilities of acutely food insecure populations and threaten recent development gains in food crisis contexts. The impact on food security may lead vulnerable households to resort to negative coping mechanisms, which will have lasting effects on their lives and livelihoods, including reduced number of meals, increased school drop-out rates, reduced means to cover health expenditures, gender-based violence, selling of productive assets, etc. The situation is of particular concern for IDPs and refugees, whose vulnerabilities are already high. Increased food prices, disruption of markets and employment opportunities in agriculture, and limited humanitarian assistance would have a particularly important impact on them.

Strategic approach

Within the United Nations Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan, FAO is seeking **USD 110 million** to protect the food security of the most vulnerable rural populations in food crisis contexts.

FAO's immediate priority is to ensure the continuity of essential operations and mitigate the pandemic's impact on vulnerable people. The Organization is thus reviewing its ongoing humanitarian and resilience programming in order to maintain the provision of humanitarian assistance to save lives and livelihoods where there are already high levels of need, while meeting new needs emerging from the effects of COVID-19. FAO will focus on supporting countries to address the pandemic's impacts on agri-food systems by scaling-up interventions to meet immediate food needs; boosting social protection programmes, including cash+; keeping the domestic food supply chain moving; and supporting smallholder farmers to increase food production. FAO's strategy in addressing the humanitarian effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is two-fold:

Understanding impacts

The complexity of the crisis and the context-specific nature of its impacts call for a coordinated global-regional-country monitoring and assessments, and common analysis of risks and potential implications of COVID-19 for food security in food crisis countries, as well as guidance and support provided to high-risk countries to identify the most appropriate approach. This includes the establishment of a data facility to help bridge current information and analysis gaps.

Ensuring continuity of humanitarian livelihood assistance and anticipating impacts

It is critical to sustain most critical humanitarian interventions, while formulating and implementing anticipatory actions based on early warning signals and resulting from monitoring and assessments conducted at country level and viability in relation to movement restrictions. These most critical humanitarian activities and anticipatory actions will aim to protect the food security of the most vulnerable rural populations by:

- stabilizing incomes and access to food;
- ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain including between rural and urban areas; and
- ensuring people along the food supply chain are not at risk of COVID-19 transmission.

FAO's target groups will depend on the country context, as specific local risk factors combined with impacts of COVID-19 will result in different priorities. Thus, tailored to country contexts and results from risk and monitoring analysis, consideration will be given to high risk groups, such as:

- subsistence and small-scale producers;
- agricultural labourers (landless farmers);
- labourers along the rural-urban food value chain;
- vulnerable fishers and fishing communities;

- international migrants, IDPs and refugees;
- vulnerable nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists who will face movements limitations; and
- marginalized ethnic minorities or indigenous groups.

Priority under this Plan will be given to countries that are already facing food crises, as per the Global Report on Food Crises and according to the evolution of the pandemic, which may result in rising humanitarian needs in countries not currently in crisis but that are extremely vulnerable to the impact of a new shock.

The specific priority areas could change, based on further analysis and the evolution of the pandemic, to identify those that may be most affected in the short term, thus requiring most urgent support. A set of parameters is being analysed to estimate the severity of potential impacts. These include, among others, existing levels of acute food insecurity, exposure to the pandemic, other stressors to food security and coping capacities.

In consideration of the epidemiological risk linked to the presence of COVID-19 in certain targeted countries, FAO will carefully review operational modalities to safeguard the delivery of critical assistance while at the same time ensuring activities are doing no harm, not contributing to the spread of the disease and keeping beneficiary communities safe.

All FAO offices have completed business continuity plans to ensure sustained presence and preparedness for further restrictions and limitations.

Safeguarding delivery of critical assistance

FAO's working arrangements at country level will be coordinated within the overall UN approach in consultation with the UN Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator and Designated Official (DO). FAO will align working arrangements with the decisions/recommendations taken by the DO, Security Management Team or United Nations Country Team (UNCT) on activation of business continuity plans, programme criticality review and reduction of presence of non-essential employees in a given country in order to reduce the health risks during the COVID-19 emergency. This will be done taking into consideration the safety and wellbeing of employees, the criticality of continued humanitarian operations and the "Stay and Deliver" principle of the UN system.

All FAO offices have completed business continuity plans to ensure sustained presence and preparedness for further restrictions and limitations, corporate guidelines on human resources management have been issued, flexible working arrangements are implemented globally. FAO country offices are taking an active part in the UN-wide prioritization and business continuity planning at country level. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals have recommended that UNCTs in priority countries use the programme criticality methodology to inform prioritization of UN operational delivery at country-level in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the update or development of country-level business continuity plans. These plans are built on the need to ensure that the UN remains able to deliver its most critical programmes and activities during any disruptive events caused by

the COVID-19 emergency. For the countries that already have valid programme criticality assessments in place, a light review will be done to inform the prioritization of activities within the new scenario of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within the above framework, FAO will continue to deliver humanitarian and resilience building activities to serve the most food insecure vulnerable populations. Facing ever-increasing restrictions including of international travel, border closures and restrictions on movement within the country and access to beneficiaries, FAO country offices will prioritize activities and programmes critical to sustaining livelihoods and maintaining local food production and food supply chains as well as supporting income of the most vulnerable rural households. Time-sensitive assistance will continue to ensure farmers can meet planting seasons, animal health interventions will safeguard the productive assets of rural herders, cash-based interventions will be expanded where possible, potentially through existing national social protection systems, and initiatives to support access to food for the most vulnerable populations.

Re-programming options are being considered; including specific assistance packages that help reduce movement and/or sustain food supplies at household/IDPs level. FAO country offices are consulting with partners on their ability to continue delivering, adapting contractual instruments to allow flexibility in duration and scope. Consultations continue with other UN agencies to combine logistics channels for aid delivery and minimize exposure of staff and beneficiaries. Further programme and operational alternate modalities are being considered on a country-by-country basis, including (i) advance procurement of input assistance and pre-positioning, (ii) combining input packages to cover longer-term needs, (iii) increasing storage and logistics capacities, (iv) launching local assessments to ascertain the COVID-19 impact on food production and (v) community-wide targeting.

Local organizations will be critical to maintain and reinforce FAO operations, particularly in light of travel restrictions. The COVID-19 operation is an opportunity to reinforce our partnership with local responders; acknowledging the need to maximize coverage and work towards greater sustainability of its approaches, FAO will identify suitable local partners based on capacity/due diligence assessments and strengthen their capacities and skills in addition to providing them with dedicated funding.

FAO will postpone any non-critical activity that risks increasing the spread of COVID-19, and will adapt its humanitarian and emergency interventions to abide by WHO and host government guidelines including social distancing, sanitization, limitation of gatherings and use of protective equipment.

► Component 1. Setting up a global data and analysis facility



budget required
USD 10 million



period
April–December 2020

Given the unprecedented nature of the crisis, creating a better understanding of the potential impacts of COVID-19 on food security is of paramount importance and urgency.

FAO, in close collaboration with key partners such as the World Food Programme, the global Food Security Cluster and the Global Network Against Food Crises, is proposing to establish a global data facility to create a common understanding and inform programming in contexts already experiencing humanitarian crises.

Recognizing the existence of many such currently ongoing efforts by food security actors, FAO intends to support and complement relevant initiatives, with the objective to set up a risk analysis and surveillance system to capture the potential impacts of COVID-19 on agricultural production, food security and livelihoods. The specific purpose of this data facility would be to ensure that the analysis of the pandemic's impacts is tailored to inform the anticipation of those impacts on agriculture-based livelihoods and the critical food supply chain.

Activities of the data facility would include:

- identifying countries and population groups most at risk of food insecurity due to COVID-19 and its indirect effects;
- identifying alternative modalities of data collection and analysis;
- identifying the best indicators and data sources for assessing and monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on the supply chain and food security;
- identifying potential hot spots requiring closer monitoring;
- enabling a wider sharing of information and analysis, as well as facilitating analysis including through a dedicated COVID-19 geospatial platform;
- monitoring movement restrictions, food and agricultural supply chains, food production and availability, as well as food and agricultural input prices, to anticipate supply shocks;
- developing scenarios and planning support;
- assessing potential impacts on farmers, as well as actors along the value chain from producers, to collectors, traders, and consumers through remote data collection in collaboration with partners;
- adapting IPC food security analyses including projections based on the common understanding of impacts generated through the data facility;
- identifying the most affected groups at country level and how they are impacted to develop anticipatory actions responding to their needs; and
- carrying out damage and loss assessments including return on investment of livelihood and food supply chain interventions.

At the core of the data facility is a structured assessment framework which is sequenced to respond to different information needs as the crisis unfolds in high-risk countries:

- i. The first stage, already under development, is assessing the risk of COVID-19 affecting food security and agricultural livelihoods, either directly through the impact on health, or indirectly through the political measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus and their consequences.
- ii. Building on the risk analysis, the second stage will be the monitoring of key risk factors and a selection of early warning indicators from national surveillance systems, FAO information systems and secondary data.
- iii. Assessments will be conducted through remote data collection in countries or areas where the monitoring of indicators will have indicated significant abnormalities and/or at relevant stage of the agricultural cycle, to understand the occurring and potential impacts on agricultural production, market chains, food security and livelihoods. This will inform critical anticipatory actions and response.
- iv. At a later stage, once the epidemiological situation is under control and it is time to plan for recovery, agriculture sector damage and loss assessments will be conducted, linked to the food security and livelihood impact assessments.

► Component 2. Ensuring availability of and stabilizing access to food for the most acute food-insecure populations



budget required
USD 60 million



period
April–December 2020

Given that among the main expected impacts of the pandemic are potential shortages of food items, possible food price spikes and reduced or lost incomes as markets are disrupted, it is critical to preserve ongoing livelihood and food production assistance as well as support incomes in order to ensure that vulnerable populations can maintain their access to food.

Preserving critical livelihood assistance and food security

One of the immediate priorities of humanitarian actors in a COVID-19 context will be to ensure that ongoing deliveries of critical humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups are not hindered and is adapted to potential COVID-19 impacts. For FAO this means preserving and protecting the agriculture livelihoods and food security of vulnerable populations including by adapting programming and operational delivery.

This means:

- continuing and scaling-up (as needed) distributions of agricultural inputs (seeds, tools, livestock feed) and provision of animal health support to ensure continuous food production and income generation in the most vulnerable areas, including within the rural-urban interface;
- supporting livelihood diversification and home-based food production (e.g. backyard gardens) to ensure further fresh food availability (e.g. distribution of small stock, distribution of tools and seeds for home gardening,) and income;
- reducing post-harvest losses, which are likely to substantially increase due to limitations in transport and access to markets, through improved storage capacities and small scale processing and conservation fruits, vegetables, milk and meat products, etc.; and
- for displaced and host communities, supporting food production in IDP/refugee camps and host communities to protect food availability (e.g. distribution of small stock, distribution of tools and seeds for small-scale agricultural production) and improve access to food and healthy diets, as well as scaling-up cash-based programmes.

Supporting agriculture and food related incomes

Access to food will further be supported by protecting incomes and purchasing power of the most vulnerable who are affected or at high risk of COVID-19. This will entail:

- where possible, working closely with governments to rapidly scale-up social protection systems, allowing quick targeting of vulnerable people through social protection management information systems and rapid support, including for reaching households in areas that are difficult to access;
- supporting the purchasing power of vulnerable and affected people and communities, through direct injection of cash where contexts allow;
- continuing to safeguard and promote agricultural and food production, value chain and related livelihoods systems through cash+ (combining unconditional cash transfers with agricultural livelihoods inputs, assets and services) adapted to the specific livelihoods and economic contexts; and
- in terms of delivery, mobile payment systems will be given preference to prevent disruptions in delivery of cash entitlements due to restrictions on movement.

► Component 3. Ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations



budget required
USD 30 million



period
April–December 2020

The proper functioning of market chains and the flow of agricultural products are key factors influencing food security and nutrition. In food crisis contexts, and where possible, FAO will maintain and support the continuous functioning of local food markets, value chains and systems focusing on vulnerable smallholder farmers and food workers as well as areas which are critical to the food supply for vulnerable urban areas.

This will entail:

- advocating for key food item corridors to remain open as much as possible while safeguarding the health of farmers and food workers across the whole value chain in compliance with national public health mitigation measures;
- supporting food processing, transport, marketing, storing with specific focus on vulnerable smallholder farmers food workers;
- strengthening local producers' groups to maintain negotiation power and access to markets and advocating for key food item corridors to remain open as much as possible;
- supporting urgent measures to incentivize smallholder food production for example through agricultural input support;
- in case of disruptions of external supply, enhancing local-level, small-scale food transformation capacity; and
- strengthening the availability of agricultural products in the market by providing transport vouchers and facilitating commercial relationships inside the different value chains.

► Component 4. Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission



budget required
USD 10 million



period
April–December 2020

In close coordination with national authorities and WHO, and remaining consistent with UN system messaging, FAO must raise awareness of actors along the food supply chain about health regulations, including rights, roles and responsibilities of workers. For example, as in the case of the EVD outbreak in West Africa in 2014 and more recently in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, FAO would use its existing network of local extension workers, community animal health workers, producers' groups and others to pass on messaging related to preventing the spread of the virus. In addition, FAO will work with partners and all actors along the food supply chain to ensure that they follow appropriate measures to reduce exposure and prevent COVID-19 transmission.

This will entail:

- identifying and addressing risk factors with partners;
- mobilizing communities and raising COVID-19 awareness through Farmer Field Schools, Livestock Field Schools, Animal Health Clubs and other networks;
- conducting sensitization trainings with actors along the food supply chain on best practices to mitigate the risk of infection;
- developing communication products (e.g. posters, banners, t-shirts, radio) in local languages; and
- training local authorities and extension services, including animal surveillance staff, forestry authorities, farmer groups, forest users, women and youth groups on best practices to mitigate risk of infection.

Partnerships and coordination

Strengthening collaboration with local organizations

Closer and large-scale collaboration with local organizations, community groups and other actors on the ground will be absolutely critical, as they are on the frontlines and will play a crucial role in maintaining supply lines, providing assistance and passing on messages that are vital and contain the spread of COVID-19, such as the importance of social distancing and hand washing, where this is feasible given the realities of the contexts in which humanitarian needs are highest.

Over the years, FAO has built partnerships with local actors in all areas where it undertakes humanitarian programmes, including national and local level extension workers, producers' groups, village savings and loans committees, and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These partnerships will be vital in facilitating support in conflict-affected and remote rural contexts where those most in need can be hard to reach and isolated from basic service provision.

Building on existing partnerships with national authorities

FAO has close relationships with relevant line ministries in many countries experiencing humanitarian crises, and will continue to use these partnerships to advocate for maintenance of critical food supply chains, support livelihoods safeguarding activities and pass on health messages related to COVID-19 to food supply chain actors.

Using existing and emerging UN coordination mechanisms

Building on its global work in terms of zoonotic prevention, preparedness and outbreak response and its related partnership with WHO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), FAO is making its expertise available to further strengthen countries capacities to prevent these zoonotic health emergencies, upstream of the human-animal interface under a One Health conceptual framework. On confirmation of any evidence of any COVID-19 infection in animals, FAO, in coordination with partners, will be available to assess the involvement and impact of animals in the event. FAO has activated an incident coordination group that brings together global, regional and country specialists to discuss the situation and ensure coordinated awareness and activities. FAO is part of the OIE COVID-19 external advisory group on animal surveillance, and is liaising with its reference centres and laboratory networks in Asia to strengthen laboratory detection and provide guidance on biosafety and biosecurity.

The Food Security Cluster, co-led by FAO and WFP, works directly with partners and stakeholders, including NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UN organizations, governments and resource partners. At present, the Cluster is closely monitoring the latest information on COVID-19 and its impact on food security, looking beyond the immediate health concerns, and preparing to scale-up to address potential negative impacts on food systems and food security, including through advocating for joint impact analysis, assessments of impacts on agricultural value chains and labour markets, price monitoring; calling for additional short-term food assistance to areas already affected by COVID-19 including urban areas and enhanced support to agricultural production and livelihoods; as well as promoting strict enforcement of hygiene and health protocols during distributions. Guidelines are being prepared by the Cluster to support decision-making at country level regarding preparedness and response for food and nutrition assistance in the context of COVID-19.

Saving livelihoods saves lives

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