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

MAY UPDATE

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Executive summary

At the beginning of April, the 2020 edition of the *Global Report on Food Crises* was issued, presenting a stark warning for the future. In 2019 – prior to the COVID-19 pandemic – 135 million people experienced Crisis (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification [IPC]/*Cadre harmonisé* [CH] Phase 3) and worse levels of acute food insecurity. A further 183 million were on the edge in Stressed food security conditions (IPC/CH Phase 2) – in other words, just one shock away from severe acute food insecurity.

COVID-19-related restrictions risk pushing many more into crisis. As the pandemic progresses in food crisis contexts, food availability as well as food access could emerge as a serious concern – in both rural and urban areas.

As the situation evolves, there is a real concern about the growing risk of famine in some countries, potentially even several famines occurring simultaneously. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, globally there were 27 million people in Emergency (IPC/CH Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity, potentially on the brink of famine. The direct and indirect effects of the pandemic could have catastrophic effects on many of them. In April 2020, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) Global Food Security Alert warned about the risk that populations in northeastern Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen could face famine as consequence of the pandemic. In Somalia, the latest data from the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit indicates around 3.5 million people are projected to be in IPC Phase 3 and above through September – a three-fold increase compared with early 2020.

Anticipatory action to safeguard livelihoods and increase access to food is urgently needed to prevent new or worsening food crises.

Preventing food crises cannot wait until the health crisis is resolved. Impacts on food access are already being seen, even in the world's wealthiest countries. For those living in contexts already experiencing food crises as a result of conflict, climate or economic instability, there is no time to waste. Up to 80 percent of people living in these contexts rely on some form of agricultural production for their livelihoods. Even in countries, such as Yemen, that rely heavily on imports, locally produced food plays an important role in meeting people's needs and especially in ensuring dietary diversity.

While the challenges facing vulnerable rural populations differ significantly according to the context and the evolutions of the pandemic, there are a number of common risks, including planting affected by reduced access to inputs due to limited market access and reduced incomes; harvesting disrupted by lack of seasonal labour; transport to markets reduced due to movement restrictions; and markets themselves constrained by lockdowns, physical distancing and lower purchasing power.

Critical agricultural seasons, livestock movements for pasture and water, harvesting activities cannot be put on hold as we tackle the virus.

Responding to these challenges requires urgent action. Critical agricultural seasons, livestock movements for pasture and water, harvesting activities cannot be put on hold as we tackle the virus. Without support, many vulnerable people will be forced to rely on humanitarian assistance just to survive – a humanitarian system already stretched to its limits before COVID-19. Anticipatory action now to avert deteriorating or emerging food crises is not just more cost effective than waiting to rebuild livelihoods and communities later, it is more humane and respectful of the dignity of the millions of people relying on some form of agriculture for their livelihoods.

The Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan has been revised significantly upwards to reflect the increasingly urgent need to address non-health impacts of COVID-19. Of these needs, the food security sector represents the largest component, for a total of USD 1.6 billion. As part of this, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is **seeking USD 350 million** to ensure the provision of critical assistance where there are already high levels of need, while meeting new needs emerging from the effects of COVID-19.

FAO will focus on four main activities, carried out at the global, regional and country levels:

- a global data facility to support data collection and analyses and inform evidence-based programming, contributing to FAO's Hand-in-Hand initiative and associated data platform.[1] The data facility is being rolled out 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;
- stabilizing incomes and access to food as well as preserving ongoing livelihood and food production assistance for the most acutely food-insecure populations;
- ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations; and
- ensuring people along the food supply chain are not at risk of COVID-19 transmission through awareness raising, social messaging and community mobilization, together with the World Health Organization (WHO) and national authorities.

[1] Hand-in-Hand is an evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative to accelerate the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2, using the most sophisticated tools available, including advanced geo-spatial modeling and analytics, to identify the biggest opportunities to raise the incomes and reduce the inequities and vulnerabilities of rural populations, who constitute the vast majority of the world's poor.

Crisis overview

Although the full impact of COVID-19 on short- and long-term food security is difficult to predict, its effects are already being seen.

The situation continues to evolve as efforts to contain the health crisis differ from country to country and restrictions ease and tighten along varied timelines. FAO is already closely monitoring impacts of the pandemic on food security at country level in countries with large populations already in or at risk of Crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity (IPC/CH Phases 3 and above).

While the COVID-19 pandemic is devastating lives, public health systems, livelihoods and economies across the world, populations living in food crisis contexts and those whose resilience has been eroded by previous crises are particularly exposed to its effects.

The latest figures from 2020 *Global Report on Food Crises* showed a significant rise in the number of people experiencing Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phases 3 and above) levels of acute food insecurity in 2019 – up to 135 million people in 55 countries as compared to 113 million people in 53 countries in 2018. A further 183 million people in 47 countries were in Stressed conditions (IPC/CH Phase 2). 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.

There is a serious risk that people will experience famine conditions if needs are not met. At the beginning of 2020, there were 27 million acutely food insecure people in 35 countries, who could potentially be pushed into famine due to the direct and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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In Somalia, the FAO-managed Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) issued an alert[2] that around 3.5 million Somalis are in IPC Phases 3 and above through September 2020, a three-fold increase compared to early 2020[3] and more than 100 percent greater than the numbers in an average year (1.6 million people in IPC Phases 3 and above). This number would be higher than the 3.3 million people that experienced Crisis and worse (IPC Phases 3 and above) levels of acute food security in 2017, when there was a high risk of famine. The sharp deterioration is due to the multiple shocks Somalia is facing in 2020, which currently coincide with Somalia's main *Gu* (April–June) cropping season. These include the impact of COVID-19, the continued desert locust upsurge, riverine and flash floods during the *Gu* season; and the extended impact of previous shocks, including floods, drought and displacement.

[2] FSNAU-FEWS NET Food Security and Nutrition Quarterly Brief (May 2020)
[3] 2019/20 Somalia Post-*Deyr* Seasonal Food Security and Nutrition Assessment

Globally, 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.

In Afghanistan, the latest IPC results highlight a deeply concerning situation. More than one in three Afghans – some 10.3 million people – are projected to be acutely food insecure (in IPC Phases 3 and above) between June and November. While this is a slight decrease on the 10.9 million people (35 percent of the population) for May–June, this is happening just after the harvest when normally there is a significant improvement in food security; particularly worrying is the projected increase in the population experiencing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity. The analysis demonstrates that while the food insecurity situation will improve in rural areas, as households will have increased access to food from own production and prices may also decrease, urban households relying on market for food purchase and on daily labour opportunities for their income will likely experience larger food gaps. In urban centres, the negative economic impacts of COVID-19 are likely to counteract the positive impacts of the harvest. The severity will be higher in areas where humanitarian access is limited. Although food is still available in nearly all markets, the prices of basic food commodities increased by 10 to 20 percent. Closed international borders have adversely impacted exports of agriculture products from Afghanistan, resulting in cascading effects along the value chains to the farm-gate level, which may exacerbate food insecurity in rural areas – despite the expected average wheat harvest – if border closures are prolonged.

In Pakistan, food insecurity is already quite high and is around 20 percent. According to the Pakistan Overview of the *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World Report* (SOFI),[4] between 40 and 62 million people in Pakistan are estimated to be undernourished. Around one-quarter of the households (around 49 million people) in Pakistan are estimated to be moderately or severely food insecure, whereas 10.1 percent of households (around 21 million people) are severely food insecure.

In Bangladesh, breakdowns in transportation systems are leading to the dumping of perishable food products and dramatic price reductions at the farm-gate, affecting food security for rural producers.[5] Prices of staple food commodities have risen as much as 25 percent in urban centres since the onset of the crisis, reducing food access for large areas of urban poor.[6] There is also growing concern for the impact of supply chain breakdowns on indigenous communities living in the Chittagong Hill Tracks, who are reliant on food imports.

Globally, 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.

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[4] The SOFI report is a joint report of United Nations (UN) organizations (FAO, WFP, United Nations Children's Fund and WHO). The prevalence of food insecurity is based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale and number of households, and household size of 2017 Population Census has been used to get estimated numbers of food insecure households and food insecure people.

[5] Rapid Assessment of Food and Nutrition Security in the context of COVID-19 in Bangladesh, April 2020

[6] Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Urban Poverty Situation Report No. 9, May 2020

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 many countries already experiencing food crises, localized increases in food prices have been recorded.

According to the May 2020 FSNAU brief, measures taken by the Government of Somalia to curb the spread of COVID-19 will cause a 30 to 50 percent decline in livestock export, a 30 to 50 percent decline in external remittance flows, a 20 to 50 percent increase of imported food prices, and a 20 to 30 percent decline of income among poor urban households and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Similar concerns have been flagged in the Sahel. WFP monitoring systems have been detecting a severe deterioration of food intake in the Sahel, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, where the recent CH analysis had already alerted to an expected rise in the number of people facing Crisis or worse (CH Phases 3 and above) levels of acute food insecurity during the upcoming lean season to 17 million compared with 10.6 million at the same time in 2019. WFP's monitoring systems already indicated an expected increase of more than 5 million people in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger alone, with insufficient food intake due to direct and indirect effects of the pandemic and containment measures.

The lessons from the 2014 Ebola virus disease 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 a food crisis within the health crisis.

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 threaten to disrupt the entire food 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 chain, while informal labourers will be hard hit by job and income losses. The lessons from the 2014 Ebola virus disease 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 a food crisis within the health crisis.

Measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 include strong restrictions of movement that dramatically change daily lives and impact agricultural livelihoods. These measures are particularly difficult for the rural poorest and most vulnerable, who tend to hold jobs and occupations that cannot be performed remotely, and often are excluded from social protection systems.

Given that up to 80 percent of the 135 million people currently experiencing acute food insecurity rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, protecting food supply chains will be crucial. The livelihoods of especially the self-employed and wage workers are at risk, and families might

resort to negative coping strategies such as distress sale of assets, taking out loans from informal moneylenders, or child labour. Specific groups of workers, including women, youth, children, indigenous people, and migrant workers, who are overrepresented in the informal economy, will experience further exacerbation of their vulnerability.

Movement restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic are impacting agricultural input supply chains at critical times in the season, reducing informal labourers' access to farmlands, wages, area of land cultivated, harvesting capacity, and constraining transport of goods to processing facilities and/or markets. Immediate impacts tend to be more severe for fresh food leading to food losses, reduction of income and deterioration in nutrition, especially among the already vulnerable population. While many governments have sought to keep food supply chains moving and ensure input flows in time for the reason, there is a growing risk that farmers will be unable to afford to purchase these inputs as they have seen their income drop due to reduced access to markets for their produce. This, in turn, would lead to reduced or no cultivation during the next season, resulting in further drops in their income and thus rises in their vulnerability, as well as less food availability in their communities and other parts of the country.

In Asia, already vulnerable populations are feeling the impact of coronavirus restrictions, for example in Cox's Bazar movement restriction are impacting on access to markets; the decreased mobility of buyers and traders is resulting in reduced prices for food in local markets while prices are increasing in larger urban markets. Smallholders are concerned for the winter vegetable harvest and planting of rice and summer vegetables, both because of limited access to labour and of inputs. An inability to fully meet basic needs, low levels of nutrition and limited access to healthcare are leaving host communities and refugees extremely exposed to the virus and economic impacts of movement restrictions. Closed international borders and restricted movements across provinces in Afghanistan resulted in a sharp increase (15–30 percent) in the price of wheat and other essentials on one hand, while closed and/or restricted markets' functioning resulted in a 25 percent increase in unemployment with 628 000 daily wage workers currently without work opportunity due to COVID-19 crisis.

In Myanmar, women are disproportionately affected as they constitute the majority of healthcare staff, in their role as carers for sick family members, and as they represent 60 percent of employees engaged in the food and accommodation services, and between 70 to 90 percent of street food vendors, while an estimated 789 000 Myanmar women are involved in childcare or domestic work overseas. Close to 35 percent of the recorded migrant workers who have returned in recent weeks are women. The COVID-19 pandemic has both direct and indirect impacts on nutrition, particularly in areas where the nutritional status of the vulnerable population, especially pregnant and lactating women and children, is already a major concern.[7]

[7] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) Myanmar, COVID-19 Addendum to the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan.

A rapid assessment of changes observed in the food and agriculture system in Pakistan during March highlighted localized price rises for wheat, changes in purchasing patterns, restrictions affecting agricultural harvests during the critical *Rabi* harvest, as well as the movement of processed food, agricultural inputs and agricultural labour; and only partial opening of wholesale markets in rural areas. These were observed despite government efforts to maintain food supply chains unimpeded during lockdown measures.

In the Philippines, there is concern about the southern region of Mindanao where over 300 000 people have been displaced by conflict and/or natural disaster. Across the region, the reduced purchasing power for daily food items by those most affected by reduced livelihood and incomes, in particular those relying on informal/daily wages in urban and rural areas, is resulting into a shift to less diversified and nutritious diets.

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Livestock supply chains could also be hit by the pandemic, with significant implications for pastoralist households, especially in Africa's drylands.

Livestock supply chains could also be hit by the pandemic, with significant implications for pastoralist households, especially in Africa's drylands. Transhumance routes are already affected by movement restrictions and border closing, limiting the access to pasture and market thus increasing inter-community tensions and dramatically impacting transhumant pastoral livelihoods. For example, in East Africa, transhumant pastoralists rely heavily on the Middle Eastern markets during Ramadan and Eid as a main source of income, movement restrictions thus threaten their entire year's income and food access. These would translate into significant income losses and therefore also purchasing power, undermining nutrition and overall resilience in the face of the health emergency. In Afghanistan, *Kuchi* herders, who embark on transhumance to summer pastures across international borders and within Afghanistan, are stuck in bordering provinces – without access to fodder or feed and veterinary services – due to closure of land borders and/or movement restrictions across district/provincial boundaries.

Slow-downs or reductions in the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance could be catastrophic. The pandemic is starting to affect humanitarian operations, in particular in terms of logistics as restrictions are curtailing the movement of both staff and critical items; and leading to rising humanitarian delivery costs.

Vulnerable fishing communities could find access to markets particularly difficult and tend to lack adequate storage facilities to secure excess catch. These would translate into significant income losses and therefore also purchasing power, undermining nutrition and overall resilience in the face of the health emergency. Already, these impacts on livelihoods and food security are manifesting in contexts of particular concern. In Cox's Bazar, for example, a rapid assessment by FAO noted that fishers were already seeing a fall in sales as movement restrictions have closed hotels and restaurants – two of their main clients.

A recent assessment by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia highlighted that the Arab region could be facing food shortages if the COVID-19 pandemic extends for several months. Supply chains, production, transportation and distribution of food products would be negatively affected, especially given the region's reliance on food imports. In particular, it notes that the pandemic threatens 55 million people in need of humanitarian aid, almost half of whom are displaced.

Slow-downs or reductions in the delivery of humanitarian assistance could be catastrophic in these contexts. The pandemic is starting to affect humanitarian operations, in particular in terms of logistics as restrictions are curtailing the movement of both staff and critical items; and leading to rising humanitarian delivery costs. There is a real possibility that as needs rise, the capacity of the already stretched humanitarian system to respond will be further constrained.

While there is a high potential for a significant rise in acute food insecurity in the coming months, this is by no means inevitable. Acting now to address not just the health dimensions of the pandemic but also the food security implications would save lives and livelihoods. Waiting for the pandemic to ease will be too late, seasons will be lost, agricultural capital deteriorated as people sell off what they can to buy food, and entire livelihoods will have to be completely rebuilt – with a massive associated cost to the humanitarian and development communities.

It is therefore crucial to rapidly mobilize and pre-empt COVID-19 impacts on food security in food crisis countries.

Regional perspectives

Asia and the Pacific

In Asia and the Pacific, the risks are diverse. In areas where the spread of COVID-19 has been high, impacts are ranging from limited access to agricultural inputs for the upcoming rice cropping season in South Asia to increasing food insecurity in import-dependent islands of the Pacific Region.

Nomadic populations in some areas of West Asia and Afghanistan are neither able to safely move their flock to their spring and summer grazing areas nor to access adequate veterinary inputs and animal feed/fresh fodder, due to layers of conflict, movement restrictions and market closures.

Furthermore, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan are at risk of an intensified desert locust infestation, as swarms move with trade winds from East Africa towards Asia.

The upcoming monsoon season in many parts of South and Southeast Asia increases risks of flooding and tropical cyclones – anticipation and response efforts will require a COVID-19 proof approach.

In Pakistan, the agriculture sector contributes significantly to the gross domestic product (GDP) (19.5 percent) and accounts for an even higher proportion of labour (42 percent, of whom up to 70 percent are women). In rural areas in general and in agriculture more specifically, employment is largely in the informal sector. COVID-19 is already impacting rural livelihoods due to the loss of jobs and wages.

Among the most vulnerable are day labourers in agriculture and non-agriculture, low-income urban households, small-scale farmers including landless sharecroppers, displaced people, elderly, those suffering from existing medical conditions, and women- and child-headed poor families.

In East Asia, the spread of COVID-19 has been limited, however the economic repercussions and trade ties with China have put a strain on their agricultural industries. This has led to widespread job losses and severe loss of incomes in many cases which are affecting food access.

For Southeast Asia, COVID-19 is overlapping with a subregional drought. In 2019, an erratic and short monsoon season resulted in below-average water availability in the Mekong River, its tributaries and key reservoirs. The Mekong basin sustains the livelihoods of roughly 60 million people. As of early 2020, below-average rainfall has persisted across the subregion affecting planting and the early development of rice crops (2019/20 winter-spring crop, which typically runs from January to June) and aquaculture practices. The combination of drought alongside COVID-19 restrictions has been seen to already drive up rice prices as the pandemic makes it harder for producers to reach markets and obtain agricultural inputs. High interest rates and other barriers to credit may mean that farmers are already struggling to access the capital they need to operate—and to cope with the challenges of drought, COVID-19 and unpredictable markets.

Displaced people, for example in Afghanistan as well as the Rohingya in Bangladesh and Myanmar, are at high risk of worsened food and nutrition insecurity, with their situation further aggravated by stigmatization in local communities. In India, 100 million internal migrant workers are trying to return to their homes amidst a nationwide lockdown, having lost their livelihood. Conflict too has spiked. In Afghanistan, the spring time fighting has commenced and is likely to intensify. As urban areas have headed into lockdown, fighting has also turned to rural areas. Such conflict mixed with returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan cause concerns of overcrowded camps and increased movement of people.

With continued international border closures coupled with national/subnational lockdowns and movement restrictions, trade in agriculture produce and related value chains has significantly reduced with cascading backwards impacts felt to farm-gate level. For example, in Afghanistan the closed borders/restricted trade flows have resulted in a significant reduction (for some commodities, up to 70–80 percent) in agriculture imports and exports including cereals, vegetables, fruits, nuts, poultry, dairy, eggs, meat, cooking oil, and other essentials. This drastic fall in trade has also adversely impacted small-scale food processing units resulting in not only loss of perishable commodities and incomes but also in loss of livelihoods for workers, labourers and in turn for smallholder farmers and herders.

Near East and North Africa

The Near East and North Africa is one of the regions of the world most affected by COVID-19. Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran have by far the highest number of cases, which are increasing rapidly throughout the region. Households in areas affected by conflict, and refugees and displaced people in the region are most at risk of the pandemic. Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon and Jordan are among the top ten countries hosting refugees worldwide, with a cumulative of approximately 6.2 million refugees.

Volatility in food prices has been reported in several vulnerable countries across the region. In Syria, since mid-March, significant price increases and some shortages in basic goods (as much as 40–50 per cent in food staples) and personal sterilization items (face masks, hand sanitizers) have been reported. Food commodity prices increased sharply in Yemen in April, according to reports, and perishable food commodities were also in short supply in many markets. Purchasing power is being affected by imposed COVID-19 curfews, reduced working hours affecting small businesses and casual labour opportunities as well as reduced remittances. Restrictions on aid delivery are preventing medical supplies and personnel from reaching vulnerable areas.

COVID-19 could exacerbate already severe food insecurity, particularly in areas affected by conflict, and among refugees and IDPs. Disruptions in the supply chain could also affect agricultural production, and limit the availability of seasonal agricultural workers. This situation could damage harvests and exacerbate already severe food insecurity, particularly in areas affected by conflict. The recession driven by COVID-19 and the decline in oil prices is affecting remittances, a major source of incomes for poor households and of hard currency for most countries in the region. Yemen and Sudan may be dramatically affected.

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In Yemen, as of the middle of April, small and micro-enterprises have been hit by unprecedented sudden redundancies. Imposed COVID-19 curfews and reduced working hours are affecting small businesses, especially restaurants and open-air markets. Availability of perishable food commodities such as fruits, vegetables and fresh milk (critical to nutrition in a country experiencing desperately high levels of acute malnutrition) is also in short supply in many markets. In addition to the impact of COVID-19, the country is grappling with the combined effects of conflict, climate-related shocks and crop pests, including fall armyworm and desert locust.

Sudan has a fragile food security and trade situation. The country's sorghum and millet balance this year is predicted to be zero, and this could easily tip into deficit. Its import requirement for wheat exceeds 2 million tonnes, while export income from livestock sales to Saudi Arabia is likely to be negatively affected by the reduction in pilgrim numbers because of measures put in place by the Government of Saudi Arabia. The loss to Sudan could be as high as 50 percent of the amount exported in 2019, or USD 300 million. The country is also confronted with a difficult desert locust problem that has developed significantly since the end of 2019, and may cause considerable losses of both crops and pasture.

Central Africa

In Central Africa, COVID-19 threatens ongoing efforts to implement the peace and security cooperation agenda and could exacerbate existing social and political unrest, especially in the most vulnerable food crisis countries. Uncertainty around the future socio-economic impacts of the pandemic combined with restrictions on movement, soaring unemployment, limited access to food, and the loss of already fragile livelihoods may generate discontent, fueling further violence and conflict.

Furthermore, while physical distancing and movement restrictions are important elements of government prevention and containment strategies for the COVID-19 pandemic, they might have severe economic and livelihood impacts on the most vulnerable populations including refugees and IDPs, which mainly rely on subsistence agricultural activities.

With the approach of off-season harvest in most countries, COVID-19 induced market closure, movement restrictions as well as cross-border trade disruptions are likely to limit people access to markets. As a result, millions of farmers will see their income and purchasing power shrinking as a result of declining demand, increased food prices and potential harvest loss.

East Africa

The region is the epicentre of a number emergencies and is a largely food insecure region. Along with COVID-19, food security in East Africa is experiencing multiple threats, including the impact of desert locust, floods and insecurity. Conflict and frequent droughts, and other extreme weather events, continue to pose serious food security and nutrition challenges in the subregion.

The cumulative impact of the stressors affecting the subregion could precipitate already dire food insecurity, affecting in particular pastoralists and smallholder farmers. According to the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group March 2020 update, 16.95 million people in the four most food insecure countries in East Africa, i.e. Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan, are in need of humanitarian assistance due to the cumulative effects of drought, floods, economic crises, conflict and displacements. Significant food security gains have been realized in most countries following above-average rains across the region towards the end of 2019. However, macro-economic shocks, protracted conflict, the ongoing desert locust infestation and the COVID-19 pandemic threaten to erode these gains. The pandemic also coincides with the start of the long rains and main growing season and peak of the land preparation activities for labour-intensive staple food crops and vegetables in the region.
The impact of desert locust on the cropping season could severely affect harvests taking place over the coming months in Ethiopia, Somalia and southern South Sudan.

The COVID-19 pandemic is thus expected to exacerbate an already fragile situation, especially if it spreads to vulnerable communities such as those with high levels of acute malnutrition, refugee settlements and IDP camps, slums, hard to access and with poor infrastructure, arid and semi-arid lands and other informal settlements. The halt of school feeding programmes occasioned by school closures as a temporary measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19, could result in significant deteriorations of nutritional outcomes among child of school-going age. According to FEWS NET, the combined risk situation in the region will likely contribute to a deterioration of food security and nutrition outcomes across the region between April and September 2020.

Movement, trade, labour shortages and travel restrictions could severely affect crop and livestock exports, imported input and food prices could increase significantly, and income will continue to decline. The pandemic has also restricted operations of humanitarian actors, and movement in and out of some refugee camps. In most countries of the subregion, movement restrictions, and limitations for social gatherings (including food market spaces) are in place and have been affecting trade activity causing food prices to rise in some locations, along with indications of food waste of fresh produce. In Ethiopia a state of emergency was declared on 10 April. National policy responses to limit the impact of COVID-19 on food markets were introduced in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. For livestock dependent economies like Somalia, South Sudan and Ethiopia, the outbreak coincided with the onset of the Ramadan when export of live animals and frozen meat to the Middle East countries was expected to increase. Loss of household income from sale of animals as well as from on-farm and off-farm activities will likely have ripple effect on the local economies of the countries, and therefore on household food security and nutrition especially among agriculture livelihood based rural communities.

Southern Africa

Most countries in Southern Africa (except Lesotho and Comoros) are currently reporting cases of COVID-19 as well as instituting several control measures to contain the spread of the epidemic. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, about 14 million people were already estimated to be food insecure in the sub-region as a result of climatic shocks, such as drought and floods and other socio-economic stressors. COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities triggering an economic slowdown in several countries, which were already facing economic challenges, especially in Zimbabwe. Parts of Mozambique, Lesotho, as well as Southern and Western Zambia are among key areas of food and nutrition security concern. The response capacity of some countries will further be diminished by high debt obligations. Resources meant for support to critical areas such as social safety nets are likely to be diverted to COVID-19 emergency response.

On food and nutrition security, Southern African Development Community Member States are planning to strengthen mechanisms that mitigate the impact of COVID-19 from disrupting the food supply chains and associated livelihoods, by minimizing disruption to farming operations, enabling access to production inputs, critical emergency veterinary drugs as well as produce markets by farming households. Many countries have introduced measures to counter over-pricing of food items as a result of COVID-19 (e.g. Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa).

Risk factors including disruption in logistics, rising import prices due to currency depreciations, loss of incomes, movement restrictions and closure of markets are likely to affect the access to food by the most vulnerable including small-scale farmers and urban dwellers in the sub-region. The lack of labour because of restricted mobility is also likely to affect ongoing harvesting activities, potentially leading to high levels of post-harvest losses, and reduced marketing opportunities. Transboundary pest hot spots such as outbreaks of African migratory locust currently affecting parts of Botswana, Namibia and Zambia, as well as outbreaks of African swine fever in Namibia and South Africa, are likely to spread to other countries due to disruptions in surveillance and movements of monitoring staff. Although prices would normally fall seasonally in the coming months with the onset of the main harvest, there are concerns that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could cause localized supply shortages, through quarantine measures for example, and trigger price spikes. Furthermore, it is likely that the number of vulnerable people in urban and peri-urban areas will increase due to, among others, loss of informal sources of income emanating from COVID-19 pandemic.

West Africa

In March 2020, all the countries in West Africa and Sahel have reported COVID-19 cases, with most governments enacting measures to contain the pandemic, including domestic and international travel restrictions, total or partial border closures, partial lockdowns, school closures, among others. These measures, although focused on containing the spread of the pandemic and preserving people's health, are likely to affect a broad range of sectors, with varying degrees of severity, including agriculture and food security. On the other hand, support policies at regional and country level are being implemented in some countries to contrast the negative effects of the pandemic on economies and vulnerable people, including fiscal and monetary measures, scale-up of social protection mechanisms and other income support measures.

In the Sahelian countries, prices of coarse grains remained generally stable or weakened further in March amid good availabilities from the 2019 harvests and imports, except in the areas where insecurity continued to disrupt markets and in countries affected by economic downturn (Sierra Leone and Liberia).

Furthermore, the closure of markets and disruptions in supply chains are preventing farmers and pastoralists to sell their products, thus affecting incomes and limiting the availability of financial resources for the purchase of inputs and the continuation of agricultural activities.

As COVID-19 cases are steadily increasing and restriction measures are still in place, additional efforts are needed to mitigate negative effects on the agriculture sector and food security in a region where an estimated 17 million people are projected to experience Crisis or worse (CH Phases 3 and above) levels of acute food insecurity during the coming lean season. Movement restrictions, physical distancing, disruptions of markets and value chains, the accessibility of inputs and the reduced mobility are likely to affect farmers' access to fields and markets in preparation for the main 2020/2021 agricultural season, as well as women in informal business and daily wage workers, and could constrain pastoral communities in carrying out seasonal transhumance movements across the region. These impacts combined with existing vulnerabilities e.g. climate hazards, plant pests (including potential desert locust invasion) and high levels of insecurity could pose a major and compounding threat for people's livelihoods and food security, thus exacerbating desperately high levels of violence against women, and stunting women's engagement in the labour market. In addition, there is concern that traditional methods of planting in groups could risk spreading the virus and measures will be needed to ensure the safety of all involved while continuing the critical main season planting.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The major food crises in Latin America and the Caribbean are in the Dry Corridor of Central America, Haiti, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and Venezuelan migrant populations living in Colombia and Ecuador. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, 18.5 million people in these countries were in acute food insecurity, representing 14 percent of the global population. The main drivers of acute food insecurity in the region are weather extremes along with political and socio-economic crises.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, COVID-19 will result in the region's worst economic and social crisis in decades, with a drop of GDP of -5.3 percent, with damaging effects on employment, the fight against poverty and the reduction of inequality. A strong increase in unemployment is expected with very negative effects on poverty and inequality. The poverty rate in the region could increase by up to 4.45 percentage points during 2020, going from 30.3 to 34.7 percent, which means an increase of 2.936 million people.

The Latin American and Caribbean region produces and has sufficient reserves to adequately feed its population in the coming months. The main risk in the short term is not being able to guarantee access to food. For many high-risk countries in the region, the period between April and June coincides with the planting season for main crops.

Restrictions on movements, combined with supply chain disruptions, may limit farmers' access to inputs as well as the availability of labour force for land preparation and sowing. Furthermore, the decline in purchasing power (including due to substantial depreciation of many of the national currencies), the loss of sources of income, and increases in food prices[8] are expected to negatively affect access to food among the most vulnerable households. Net food importing countries (e.g. Caribbean countries, Mexico, Ecuador, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) are particularly vulnerable due to currency devaluation and trade constraints.

Livelihoods and high risk groups are being widely disrupted by the pandemic: subsistence and small-scale producers; agricultural labourers (landless farmers, labourers along the rural-urban food value chain), vulnerable fishers and fishing communities, indigenous groups, migrants, and households deriving their income from remittances, as well as from the informal economy.

Many countries have been affected by localized problems of food availability in formal and informal markets. In several countries, such as The Plurinational State of Bolivia , Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, food prices have increased significantly, also due to currency devaluation. Due to lockdown measures in Colombia, many Venezuelan migrants are returning home as they are not covered by financial aid packages and have lost their income sources.

In parallel with lockdowns, school closures and other containment measures, most countries in the region have implemented a variety of policies that seek to curb the negative impact of COVID-19 on agriculture and food security, with a predominant focus on ensuring immediate needs (access to food, income stabilization, livelihoods protection), and ensuring the continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations and areas that are fundamental to the food systems. However, the weak financial situation of most countries in the region poses a challenge to the implementation of comprehensive support policies.

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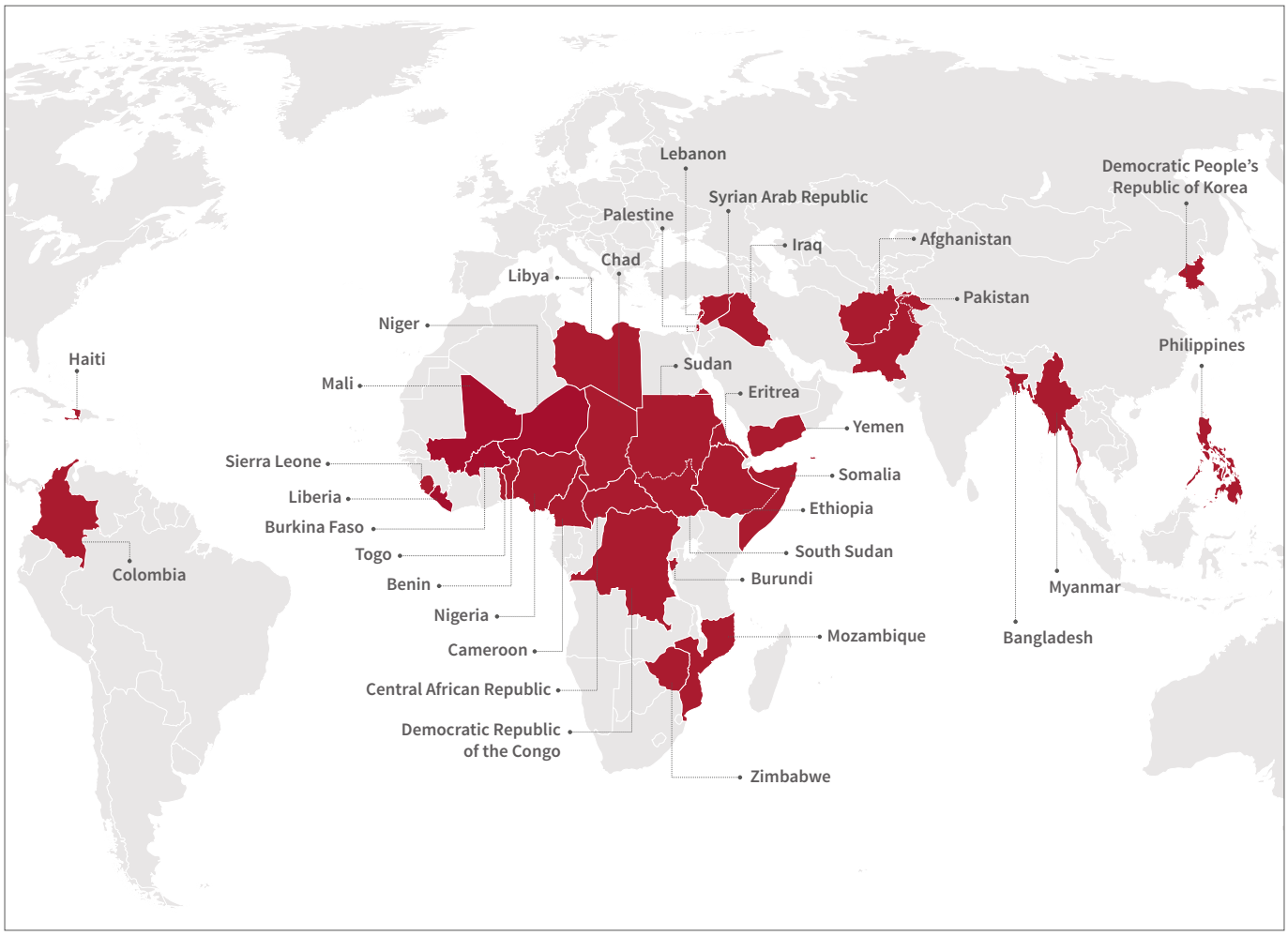
[8] Of the 14 products tracked by FAO, 19 countries have average increases of more than 5 percent, rising up to 50 percent.

Strategic approach

Within the United Nations (UN) Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan, FAO is seeking **USD 350 million** to protect the food security of the most vulnerable rural populations in food crisis contexts.

Countries included in FAO's component of the United Nations Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan



Source: UN World map, February 2020.

FAO's immediate priority is to ensure the continuity of essential operations and mitigate the pandemic's impact on vulnerable people, including by helping to reduce transmission of the virus along the food chain.
Given movement restrictions and other control measures, FAO has reviewed its existing operational mechanisms and programmes to adjust them to the new reality, focusing on remote support where possible and ensuring adherence to WHO and national guidelines for health and safety during planting and harvesting seasons. Such adjustments are being built on existing successful models, such as FAO's mobile money scheme in Somalia, which is the largest such programme in the country and ensures that remote, rural communities continue to receive cash grants without requiring significant human interaction that could facilitate the spread of the virus. Training modules for farmer fields scold are being adapted to include subjects such as hygiene, food safety and good nutrition practices;

ongoing work with agriculture extension services and community-based organizations is being adapted to include awareness raising and streamline communication on appropriate practices to reduce the risk of the virus transmission. In Afghanistan, FAO has developed checklists/guidelines on COVID-19-safe measures and practices for implementing partners to follow during humanitarian assistance as well as for market stakeholders to follow for uninterrupted COVID-19-safe functioning of markets related to agriculture produce, inputs and livestock/live animals trade.

In East Africa and the Near East, where 42 million people are facing acute food insecurity, the desert locust campaign is critical to safeguarding livelihoods and food security. Despite COVID-19-related movement restrictions, as of early May, over 365 000 hectares of land had been treated in the ten countries under FAO's appeal and operations were continuing. Thanks to these operations, and based on very preliminary analyses and projections of areas controlled and likely damage caused if not controlled, it is anticipated that 720 000 tonnes of cereal have already been saved, worth around USD 220 million. This is enough to feed almost 5 million people for one year. Through damage averted to rangeland and livestock tropical units, an additional 350 000 pastoral households have been spared from livelihood loss and distress. The uninterrupted continuation of the desert locust control programme has been possible due to the governments in affected countries prioritizing the response, as well as FAO's early decision to spread the risk of disruption across the supply chain by procuring pesticides and other assets from various locations.

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In West Africa, the main agricultural season is about to start, providing hopes for a successful harvest and improved food security for the most vulnerable populations, especially in the most food insecure areas which are also affected by insecurity and displacements, such as the Central Sahel (Liptako-Gourma: Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger) and the Lake Chad basin area (Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad). In these two regions, almost 90 percent of people experiencing Crisis or Emergency (CH Phases 3 or 4) levels of acute food insecurity are concentrated, with 41 percent in Nigeria alone – mostly in the three northeastern states.

Supporting production during the main cropping season is key to ensure availability and access to food from September 2020 in these highly vulnerable areas. At the same time, farmers and herders need to be assisted during the current agricultural and pastoral lean season, when household food stocks are running out, food prices are increasing, pasture is not available and movement of livestock limited by insecurity and COVID-19 restrictions. FAO has ensured its capacity to deliver and in the most critical areas of the subregion, especially in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, and is implementing an emergency agricultural inputs distribution to around 150 000 households, while ensuring support to around 55 000 households whose livelihoods are predominantly livestock-based, through emergency animal feed distributions and vaccination campaigns. Cash transfer interventions are also being implemented in Burkina Faso, targeting around 13 000 households. These interventions are mainly targeting IDPs with access to land and host communities.

Recognizing that women are bearing much of the impacts of COVID-19-related restrictions, given that they predominantly earn their income from informal trading and production of vegetables and small livestock and poultry, and are often unable to access markets, while also being largely responsible for caring for and ensuring the nutrition of household members, FAO is seeking to target women as much as possible in its interventions. In Senegal, for example, FAO is working with UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund to link women's producer groups (involved in production or processing of agricultural, fisheries and livestock products) to extremely vulnerable women-headed families. The women's producer groups, whose access to market has been affected by restrictions related to the pandemic, will soon start supplying the contents of a "household basket" to families with malnourished children under five. The baskets themselves comprise a range of nutritious food, including cereals, meat and eggs or processed fish, and vegetables. In Afghanistan, FAO has fast-tracked the provision of backyard poultry packages and vegetable seed kits for vulnerable women-headed families, landless labourers and marginal farming households.

In Burkina Faso, FAO is implementing a project to increase agricultural production in urban and peri-urban areas and link them with the consumers in confined neighbourhoods of the capital city.

In Syria, FAO has been able to continue the ongoing support vegetable producers by helping them to set up nurseries, which are estimated to bring farmers an additional income of almost USD 2 000 per year. The project began in March 2020, which coincided with the spread of COVID-19, complicating the distribution of materials and organizing of training sessions. Nonetheless, FAO has been able to continue it support to production and conducted field awareness sessions for the farmers to slow the spread COVID-19 by practicing physical distancing, sterilizing tools, wearing masks and gloves correctly as a protection measure, and organizing outdoor training sessions to avoid meeting indoors. In addition, FAO is using modern communication applications, such as WhatsApp groups, to exchange knowledge and information on vegetable production.

Similarly, in Afghanistan procurement of vegetable kits has been fast-tracked and inputs pre-positioned since the very early stages of the crisis to ensure that most vulnerable households would have access to safe and nutritious food during months of movement restrictions and limited access to markets. In addition, 17 250 families in the country are being targeted for cash transfers. In Myanmar, cash-for-work activities planned for April/May/June 2020 in Rankine to improve community assets and disaster risk reduction (DRR) infrastructure have been postponed and reprogrammed as unconditional cash transfers to top up existing government social protection schemes targeting pregnant and lactating women.

The long presence of FAO in many countries has helped to build a long-established relationship with governments and local organizations, particularly in terms of enhancing their technical capacity. FAO has been strengthening the capacity of hundreds of local actors – from government workers to small community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – for decades. This has included a wide range of support including on early warning and alerts, livestock disease and plant pest identification and reporting, emergency field operations, training, and advocacy for good agricultural practices, especially related to disaster risk reduction. This support has been further strengthened and scaled up as part of FAO's commitments under the Grand Bargain.

In the response to COVID-19, local community organizations, national extension service providers, and local NGOs are on the frontlines in both responding to the health crisis and in managing its wider impacts. Thanks to our existing relationships, FAO is already working with these partners (extension workers, community animal health workers, women's groups, cooperatives) to pass on health and safety messaging to protect rural people and actors along the food supply chain.

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. FAO is already populating a data facility to help bridge current information and analysis gaps, as well as to feed the IPC processes, together with WFP, in our joint efforts to monitor hunger. In addition to this effort to analyse food insecurity in humanitarian contexts to inform emergency and resilience programming, FAO has also launched an initiative to collect data at global level to assess the impact of COVID-19 on food insecurity using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES).[9] This is needed not only to be able to measure impact in traditional food insecurity hotspots (e.g. food crisis countries), but also to identify emerging new pockets of food insecurity in countries and among population groups that have not been the traditional target of humanitarian assistance.

[9] The use of FAO's FIES system provides the opportunity to measure the impact of COVID-19 at different levels of severity of food insecurity for different countries, and for different population groups within countries. FAO's goal is to collect FIES data to cover nationally representative samples of the population in at least 100 countries in all regions in the world using remote data collection tools. Two or three rounds of data collection are foreseen in order to properly capture the evolution of the impact of COVID-19 on food insecurity.

- **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:
  - ensuring availability of and stabilizing 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;
- women and youth, who have been hard hit by constraints to the informal economy;
- 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.

FAO is currently focusing on such actions in 34 countries, including those already experiencing and those at-risk of food crises. The number of countries may increase depending on the evolution of the pandemic, which could result in rising humanitarian needs in countries that are extremely vulnerable to the impact of a new shock. Actions and priority areas will be continuously reviewed and adjusted according to the evidence emerging from the global data facility. 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 targeted countries, FAO has carefully reviewed 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.

FAO has postponed any non-critical activity that risks increasing the spread of COVID-19, and has adapted its humanitarian interventions to abide by WHO and host government guidelines including physical distancing, sanitization, limitation of gatherings and use of protective equipment.

► Component 1. Global data and analysis facility

In order to prevent a rapid and substantial rise in the number of people experiencing acute food insecurity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, anticipatory actions and effective response to safeguard lives and livelihoods must be informed by clear evidence. This means collecting data, information and analysis on the actual and potential impacts of COVID-19 on agri-food systems and food security in countries already experiencing humanitarian crises. Such data can then be used to inform evidence-based programming, as well as feeding into the IPC processes, which this year will mainly be conducted through virtual modalities.

Using internal resources as a catalyst, FAO has already initiated the setting up of a global data and analysis facility for this purpose. This is being done in close collaboration with partners including WFP and the global Food Security Cluster within the framework of the Global Network Against Food Crises. In particular, the partnership with WFP is key as it provides the means to complement the understanding of impacts on food production, supply and people's access to food (FAO) with data on acute food gaps and needs for humanitarian interventions (WFP). Remote data collection modalities are being put into place to guarantee the ability to gather data in contexts of movement restrictions.

However, these critical efforts need to be urgently scaled up. Given the considerable uncertainty around the exact future impacts of COVID-19 on food security, the facility is a critical public good as it will help create a common understanding of COVID-19 impacts on agriculture-based livelihoods and critical food supply chains in food crisis contexts and those at risk of a sharp increase in acute food insecurity, allowing rapid pre-emptive actions.

This will ensure timely communication, limit duplication of analyses, and enhance cross-country comparison of impacts and activities to improve the effectiveness of action. It will contribute and reinforce joint food security analysis under the IPC framework by providing direct and indirect evidence on food security which will also include the Food Insecurity Experience Scale. The evidence collected on the platform will also inform programming, helping to channel resources towards the areas in most urgent need.

At the global level, the data and analysis facility is the centre of coordination of all initiatives across geographical levels. A two-way system is being put in place: allowing greater sharing of global datasets, analyses and methodological guidelines; and facilitating knowledge exchange on survey results, methods and good practices across regions and countries.

At regional level, FAO Regional and Subregional offices play a central role in supporting countries for primary data collection, ensuring coherence with the methodologies, standards and visual/analytical outcomes of the global data platform. Key activities include:

- reinforcing partnerships with regional actors;
- strengthening capacities of country offices for conducting risk analysis,

monitoring and assessments on COVID-19 effects on agriculture and food security; and
- contributing to analyse data and information collected at country level from a regional perspective.

Through remote data collection tools, surveys have already started with the goal that they will be conducted regularly for monitoring the food security situation and coping strategies of the most vulnerable households, as well as potential disruptions to food supply chains, agricultural employment, food and agricultural input prices, the delivery of humanitarian assistance, among others. The surveys, conducted by FAO in collaboration with WFP wherever possible, are aimed at households, farmers, food and agricultural input traders and key informants. While surveys are adapted to country contexts, they follow agreed standards and methodological guidelines in order to ensure that the information can be aggregated and analysed at regional and global level.

This will complement broader FAO global data collection efforts to fully understand the scope of the impact on food insecurity and to be able to guide intervention. This will help identify new areas in need of attention as well as places where COVID-19 will have further detrimental effects on food security not only at extreme, severe levels but also at moderate levels, which might compromise people's ability to access a healthy diet.

All these efforts will contribute to FAO's Hand-in-Hand initiative and associated interactive data platform, which uses the most sophisticated tools available, including advanced geospatial modeling and analytics, to identify the key opportunities to raise the incomes and reduce the inequities and vulnerabilities of rural populations, who constitute the vast majority of the world's poor.

Reinforcing support to the global Food Security Cluster

The Cluster, co-led by FAO and WFP, is closely monitoring the latest information on COVID-19 and its impact on food security, looking beyond the immediate health concerns, 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; 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 COVID-19 Technical Working Groups, which include strong participation from FAO staff to provide technical input, to support decision-making at country level regarding preparedness and response for food and nutrition assistance in the context of COVID-19.

Recent guidelines have been issued on a range of topics, including on emergency livestock actions in the context of COVID-19, support food market systems facing COVID-19, emergency seed interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

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 agricultural livelihoods and food security of vulnerable populations including by adapting programming and operational delivery.

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.

Main activities will thus include:

- 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. These activities are particularly linked to the agricultural seasons and timeliness is essential. In South Sudan, despite the COVID-19-related restrictions in place, FAO has been able to continue its ongoing provision of critical inputs to over 4 million people – the Organization's largest input distribution programme. In Somalia, working with the Livestock Professional Associations, FAO has adapted ongoing livestock vaccination campaigns to reach all targeted livestock by going door-to-door, community-to-community, rather than organizing large gatherings where several communities would bring their animals to be vaccinated and treated.

In Afghanistan, FAO is working with implementing partners and the Veterinary Field Units on provision of livestock protection packages and ensuring provision of anticipatory veterinary services to vulnerable Kuchi herders. In West Africa and the Sahel, FAO is rolling out seed distribution campaigns to ensure farmers can meet the upcoming season, while in Colombia, planned support will include provision of essential farming inputs to guarantee 3 to 6 months of food production.

- 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. Through re-programming existing projects, FAO has been able to deliver summer seeds to farmers in Cox's Bazar to increase vegetable production. In Afghanistan, existing humanitarian and new projects are fast-tracking provision of backyard poultry packages especially to vulnerable women-headed households.

- Reducing post-harvest losses for small-scale producers, which are likely to substantially increase due to limitations in storage facilities, transport and access to markets, through improved storage capacities and enhanced opportunities for small-scale processing and conservation of fruits, vegetables, milk and meat products, etc.

- 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. In Jordan, FAO is focusing on a range of measures to bolster social safety nets, including through promoting sustainable food production techniques, supporting women's groups through enhancing their links to financial services and capacity building. In Zaatari camp, building off the common 'jameiya' social funding mechanism, FAO plans to set up savings and loans streams to (i) support small enterprise investments and (ii) offer a safety net.

- 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. In Colombia, for example, this will be a major portion of FAO's interventions to address the impacts of COVID-19. Such schemes will seek to incentivize continued food production among highly vulnerable populations. In the Philippines, FAO together with UNICEF and WFP will complement the Government's Social Amelioration Program to respond to COVID-19. Support will be provided to augment the gap in selected areas in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao where poverty doubled in the last two decades, despite the reduced incidence of poverty in the country and 54 percent of the population was living below the poverty line in 2015.

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- Supporting the purchasing power of vulnerable and affected people and communities, through direct injection of cash where contexts allow. In many parts of Asia, FAO is reprogramming existing cash-for-work schemes as unconditional cash schemes or is scaling up existing national social protection schemes with a specific focus on the needs of women and children in rural areas. For example in Afghanistan, FAO reprogrammed the existing and planned for cash-for-work interventions into unconditional cash transfers, while complying with national public health guidelines on lockdown and related restrictions on gathering of people. In Jordan, too, FAO has reprogrammed planned cash-for-work interventions in Zaatari Refugee Camp to unconditional cash to maintain beneficiaries' access to food.

- 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.

In terms of delivery, mobile payment systems for cash-based interventions will be given preference to prevent disruptions in delivery of cash entitlements due to restrictions on movement. These will be informed by FAO's experience with mobile money in several countries, but particularly that in Somalia, where remote interventions have been essential to reach the most remote and conflict-affected people for many years.

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

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 and food workers. One of the immediate priorities for several countries in Asia is ensuring access to land and labour, in compliance with national COVID-19 protocols, for the upcoming harvesting seasons. Support is being provided for transport, procurement of machinery and storage to ensure the crops reach markets and to avoid food losses. For example, in Bangladesh, FAO is already starting to support farmer's group associations and small and medium enterprises with mechanization and appropriate technology for post-harvest storage and processing to mitigate food losses, improve market access and quality.

- 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. In Zimbabwe, FAO is planning to support online post-harvest management training for farmers and enhance their access to market information through improved digital platforms.

- Working with agriculture products/inputs-related market managers, local officials and related stakeholders to ensure uninterrupted and COVID-19-safe functioning of these markets. In Afghanistan, FAO has already initiated this in 17 main markets across 7 provinces through development of specific checklists/guidelines on COVID-19-safe functioning of markets, sensitization and training of market managers on these coupled with distribution of disinfectants, hygiene kits and COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE) for market stakeholders (loaders, cleaners, traders, vendors, customers, and such).

- Supporting urgent measures to incentivize smallholder food production for example through agricultural input support. For example, in Bangladesh, where under an existing project, FAO is shortly be providing grants to incentivize smallholder value-addition, particularly for perishable items that contribute to a healthy diet.

- In case of disruptions of external supply, enhancing local-level, small-scale food transformation capacity.

- 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

Mass communication campaigns to inform at-risk or affected populations have been shown to play a critical role in efforts to reduce the spread of disease. FAO's primary target beneficiaries are people who by nature are hard to reach – living in rural and often remote areas with limited access to basic health services, or to other forms of media used by the state to raise awareness. There is an urgent need for local-level awareness raising that is more adapted to the context of rural farming, fishing and pastoral communities.

In Afghanistan, FAO is working with implementing partners and the Animal Health Directorate on developing simple information, education and communication materials for Kuchi herders on COVID-19-safe practices to adopt during transhumance as well as working with Veterinary Field Units to ensure anticipatory/timely veterinary service provision.

Over decades, FAO has built strong relationships with local actors, from training and building networks of community animal health workers to women's groups and Dimitra clubs, national extension workers and professional veterinary associations, farmer field schools, as well as producers' associations and local community organizations. In parts of Asia, awareness raising campaigns are being promoted within local markets and through FAO's work with farmer groups and farmer fields schools. These groups constitute a powerful means to raise awareness together with government services. In the Sahel, where communities gather to plant during the main season, which begins from June, this activity will be essential.

Efforts are already starting in Senegal, using the existing Dimitra Clubs and community radios to spread critical messages on preventing COVID-19 to people not reached by other forms of media used by the state. Depending on the method of message delivery, groups are provided with relevant assistance. For example, for in-person dissemination, the partner groups will be provided with washing kits and individual protection

(e.g. masks and gloves) so they can visit communities and demonstrate handwashing, raise awareness on physical distancing and preventative measures, provide information on the causes and symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do, and provide communities with kits potentially including soap, bleach, masks, etc. Collaboration with community radios, posters, SMS campaigns, etc. are contextualized for farmers, herders, and other people who work along the food value chain. Social messages are being developed in collaboration with the UN risk communication teams, government and local communities and then FAO works with WHO and partners such as the UN risk communications team, local communities and others to ensure their widespread dissemination. By working closely with these groups and developing clear health and safety messages with WHO, FAO is seeking to reduce transmission of the virus along the food value chain, from producers to consumers.

FAO is already starting this work at the country level, for example through cash++ interventions in Myanmar that combine cash, agricultural inputs and social behaviour change communication on nutrition and COVID-19 prevention. In Viet Nam, FAO is working with UN Women and Save the Children on cash+ education, awareness raising and social messaging on COVID-19 through reprogramming existing resources. In Haiti too, this work has already started. In Zimbabwe, FAO is integrating COVID-19 guidance and messaging into its existing guidelines to promote nutrition, healthy eating and food safety at household level. In Bangladesh, under a recently-started project, FAO is supporting safe food vendor carts and street vendors to adhere to new safety and hygiene measures through training and converting carts. Other countries in which FAO plans to introduce or scale up this activity include Colombia; the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, where the focus will be on addressing fear of catching COVID-19 from livestock; Libya; Mozambique; the Niger; and Sierra Leone.

In Pakistan, where 60 percent of the population relies on agricultural livelihoods and resides in rural areas, COVID-19 response options have focused on protecting the food value chain, providing agricultural inputs, and curbing the spread of infection by sharing key preventative health messages. FAO has partnered with the Ministry of Health, the United Nations Children's Fund, and other UN agencies to develop and distribute over 80 000 materials (e.g. posters and brochures), translated into local languages and displayed in supermarkets, local food shops, and other public places. Health and physical distancing guidelines are also being shared remotely via radio broadcast, WhatsApp, and FAO Pakistan social media channels, including Urdu messages and infographics developed by FAO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. This is complemented by online awareness sessions conducted by FAO field staff now working from home. As 40 percent of the population in Pakistan is illiterate, primarily within rural communities, FAO has also harnessed its farmer field school network to raise further awareness through hands-on, participatory demonstrations at the field level. This includes a module on hygiene, nutrition and safety adapted to emphasize key learning around COVID-19 prevention best practices.

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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 physical 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. 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 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 the conceptual framework of One Health. 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 International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UN organizations, governments and donors. 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.

Global Network Against Food Crises

In responding to COVID-19 impacts in food crisis countries, actors along the humanitarian-development-peace nexus must work together through the Global Network Against Food Crises to address immediate needs and minimize longer-term impacts of COVID-19-related lockdowns and restrictions on food security and food systems. Global Network partners have issued a joint statement on the way forward and priority actions to respond to multiplying food crises, which are now compounded by COVID-19, and to protect and strengthen food systems in the post-pandemic word. In addition, through the Global Network mechanism, FAO and WFP are establishing a coordinated monitoring system of risks for food security and food systems from COVID-19 in order to identify and initiate critical anticipatory actions.

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Partnerships for anticipatory action

The key actors engaged in the field of anticipatory action are mobilising to coordinate efforts around preventing and mitigating the direct and secondary impacts of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable people. The Early Action Focus Task Force – comprising the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, FAO, WFP, Start Network and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – is advancing coordination efforts in high-risk countries to maximize the effectiveness of anticipatory actions against the expected negative effects of COVID-19 as well as the compounding effects of forecast climate hazards. The Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) – a global partnership which aims to convene governments, humanitarian, development and climate stakeholders in order to advance the global agenda on promoting a more anticipatory approach to disasters- has established a working group on COVID-19 to formulate recommendations on (1) anticipating shocks during the COVID-19 pandemic; and (2) engaging with relevant actors to strengthen anticipatory action in the health sector. As a convening partner of the REAP, and through the activities outlined in the COVID-19 appeal, FAO will contribute to the achievement of these broader objectives.

Saving livelihoods saves lives

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