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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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**Real-time evaluation of FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery
Programme – Phase II Progress report**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Designed in July 2020, the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme (RRP) aims to enhance coordination of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) response to the crisis and its related resource mobilization. Conceived as an “umbrella programme”, it includes a range of initiatives, projects and activities related to FAO’s response in seven priority areas ranging from humanitarian response to long-term recovery and agrifood systems transformation.
- This report provides a status update of the work being carried out to assess the contributions of the RRP (Phase 2 of the real-time evaluation). The final report of the real-time evaluation will be submitted to the Programme Committee session in November 2022.
- Ten country case studies are being conducted and a series of self-assessed contributions will be prepared encompassing all seven RRP priority areas. The latter will provide additional evidence on FAO's support to Members in their efforts to address the effects of the pandemic.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the content of the document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

I. Background

1. At its 129th Session, the Programme Committee of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) requested that the Office of Evaluation (OED) conduct a real-time evaluation (RTE) of FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme (RRP). The RTE was launched at the end of January 2021 and covers FAO's COVID-19 responses that have been grouped under the Programme, from the onset of the pandemic to date, irrespective of budget source or geographic location.

II. Real-time evaluation approach

2. The real-time evaluation assesses the progress made through the RRP and provides feedback to foster organization-wide learning, inform decision-making and promote accountability. As a first step of the RTE, a stocktaking study was conducted which identified four areas of focus to prioritize that were included in its work plan:

FOCUS	TOPIC	RTE WORK PLAN
1. Programme design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconstruct the Programme's theory of change 	May–June 2021
2. Humanitarian response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons learned and good practices on providing humanitarian support in food crisis countries in the context of COVID-19 	May–September 2021
3. Knowledge products and data services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons learned and good practices on development, dissemination and uptake of COVID-19 related knowledge products and services 	May–September 2021
4. Programme results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributions of FAO's Response and Recovery Programme (country studies) 	December 2021–June 2022

3. These areas of focus were selected because of their importance in addressing the initial response of the Organization and the subsequent RRP. Based on the areas of focus, the RTE implemented a rolling work plan consisting of distinct, complementary analytical or stand-alone evaluative exercises conducted in two phases: Phase 1 covered points 1-3 while Phase 2 covers point 4. This report provides an update on the progress on Phase 2.
4. The main question Phase 2 seeks to answer is: *what have been the contributions of the Programme to mitigate the effects and recover from the pandemic?* To answer the main question, the evaluation focuses on three dimensions: programmatic approach, effectiveness, and identifying lessons learned and good practices related to delivering results. As such, Phase 2 of the evaluation has been designed as a contribution analysis, particularly at the country level, highlighting key results of the Programme as per the request of Senior Management and the FAO Programme Committee.
5. The scope of the contribution analysis in terms of substantive coverage includes response actions by FAO starting in March 2020 that shaped the design of the Programme as well as those directly stemming from it through December 2021. In various instances, some pandemic-related knowledge products and data services, as well as immediate humanitarian response work preceded the start of the Programme but have been included in the scope of the RTE due to their significance.
6. The RTE adopted a consultative approach including creating core learning groups of key internal stakeholders to serve as a sounding board, validate findings, provide evidence of progress through self-assessed contributions, and assist in the uptake of the good practices and lessons learned.
7. Ten country contribution case studies are being conducted. The selection of countries was determined using a two-step process:

- i. The number of countries allotted to each region is proportional to the regional share of the total Programme budget¹ (while ensuring that each region had at least one but no more than four countries included).
 - ii. Specific countries were then identified and ranked based on the following criteria:
 - COVID response priority areas (PA) coverage: number of PAs addressed in a country;
 - programme-funded projects: number of projects in a country's portfolio tagged as part of the Programme;
 - budget: total amount disbursed; and
 - country profile: diversity in terms of crisis status (i.e. based on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, IPC) and geographic representation (when possible).
8. OED, Priority Area Leads and Regional Offices reviewed the list of countries that emerged from applying the criteria – especially taking into consideration evaluability, availability of data-rich examples and diversity of themes addressed. As a result of the consultations, the following countries were selected:

Regional Office for Africa (RAF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cabo Verde ▪ Chad ▪ Kenya ▪ Malawi
Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Egypt ▪ Iraq
Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bangladesh ▪ Cambodia
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (RLC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Honduras
Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tajikistan

9. Limiting the evaluation to highlighting only examples drawn from a few countries risked excluding significant contributions in all priority areas made by the Programme, not only in other countries, but also at the regional/global levels. To minimize this risk, the evaluation incorporated a “self-assessed” dimension to extract other contribution examples. Regional Offices and Priority Area Leads have been invited to submit examples of contributions (i.e. most significant change) based on a template developed by OED that will assist them in capturing self-assessed cases.
10. This aspect of Phase 2 is conducive to building evaluative capacity and promoting the exchange of good practices and lessons learned – thus fulfilling one of the overall objectives of the RTE. The RTE invited the Office of Emergencies and Resilience (OER) to submit such an example of a self-assessed contribution for this report. In addition to succinctly providing evidence of outcomes achieved, the example serves as a guide to other stakeholders when preparing their submissions. Refer to section IV. C for the preliminary case study.
11. The final report of the RTE will be presented during the 134th Session of the Programme Committee in November 2022.

¹ As of August 2021.

III. FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme

A. Programme overview

12. FAO's response to the COVID-19 crisis is characterized by two phases: i) the "immediate response phase" (March–June 2020); and ii) the "transition and recovery phase" (July 2020 onwards). The launch of FAO's COVID-19 RRP marks the start of Phase 2. Throughout these phases, FAO has strived to ensure business continuity and external coordination by establishing flexible and innovative mechanisms to facilitate programme and project implementation, monitoring and evaluation (some of which predate the pandemic).
13. During Phase 1, two efforts stand out in FAO's response, both of which were mainstreamed into the RRP. The first was FAO's knowledge products and data services work advocating for increased attention to the effects of COVID-19 in food security that led to a large range of materials being produced for a more evidence-based response. Among the actions undertaken, in early April 2020 FAO launched the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Portal, published several policy briefs and numerous guidance and reference documents. Likewise, international awareness activities were launched to prevent the health crisis from becoming a food crisis. The second was FAO's humanitarian response. The Organization contributed to the United Nations (UN) system's humanitarian response (Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, GHRP) which became the RRP's Priority Area 1 (see below).
14. The Programme was developed to enhance coordination of FAO's response to the crisis of existing and new projects (by fostering synergies and improving their delivery within the context of the pandemic) and its related resource mobilization. Conceived as an "umbrella programme", it is designed to include all projects/trust funds related to the various components of the RRP operating under a simplified governance structure. The goals of the Programme are to mitigate the immediate impacts of the pandemic and strengthen the long-term resilience of food systems and livelihoods.
15. These were to be achieved through projects being implemented in seven priority areas:
 1. **Global Humanitarian Response Plan.** Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and safeguarding livelihoods in food crisis contexts.
 2. **Data for Decision-Making.** Ensuring quality data and analysis for effective policy support to food systems and Zero Hunger.
 3. **Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty.** Pro-poor COVID-19 responses for an inclusive post-pandemic economic recovery.
 4. **Trade and Food Safety Standards.** Facilitating and accelerating food and agriculture trade during COVID-19 and beyond.
 5. **Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery.** Protecting the most vulnerable, promoting economic recovery and enhancing risk management capacities.
 6. **Preventing the Next Zoonotic Pandemic.** Strengthening and extending the One Health approach to avert animal-origin pandemics.
 7. **Food Systems Transformation.** "Building to transform" during response and recovery.

B. Programme portfolio

16. The Programme was officially launched on 14 July 2020 with an appeal for USD 1.32 billion. As of early March 2022, based on an analysis of data provided by the Resource Mobilization and Private Sector Partnerships (PSR) Division, the Programme's portfolio consisted of 272 projects with a total budget of USD 354 477 059 (almost 27 percent of the total appeal). Approximately 93 percent of the budget (USD 328 749 695) originates from voluntary contributions, while 7 percent is from technical cooperation projects (USD 25 727 364).
17. Table 1 shows the distribution of projects and corresponding budget totals per region, while Table 2 shows these per priority areas. The Africa and Near East regions account for 70 percent

of the Programme's budget. The humanitarian (PA1), social protection (PA3) and resilience (PA5) priority areas make up 60 percent of the Programme's budget.

Table 1. Regional distribution of the Programme portfolio

Region	Number of projects	Budget (USD)	Percentage of budget
RAF	109	134 414 209	38%
RNE	36	115 016 811	32%
RAP	56	45 458 498	13%
RLC	46	31 881 069	9%
GLO	11	14 488 512	4%
REU	14	13 217 960	4%
Total	272	354 477 059	100%

Table 2. Distribution per priority area

Priority Area	Number of projects	Budget (USD)	Percentage of budget
PA1	67	114 877 602	32%
PA2	24	2 146 016	1%
PA3	29	41 672 367	12%
PA4	8	1 825 000	1%
PA5	57	57 601 196	16%
PA6	10	3 209 235	1%
PA7	40	10 215 520	3%
All	1	1 200 000	0%
Unavailable	36	121 730 123	34%

18. The Programme's major resource partners include the World Bank (17.3 percent), the European Union (11.2 percent), Canada (9.4 percent), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (6.5 percent), Japan (5.3 percent), the United States of America (3.8 percent), and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) (3.8 percent).

IV. Real-time evaluation findings and ongoing analysis

A. RTE Phase 1 findings highlights

19. The findings of the RTE Phase 1 were presented to the 132nd Session of the Programme Committee. The key takeaway points pertaining to good practices and lessons learned related to the humanitarian response, and knowledge products and data services were:

Good practices

- Defining strategic objectives early on and putting in place processes to address emerging issues in a crisis context proved essential in ensuring FAO's response was relevant.
- Leveraging existing data sources, including adapting information systems as well as partnerships was an effective approach to provide context-relevant evidence and guidance to mobilize resources and address user's needs.

- Adopting measures that fostered “horizontal” (multidisciplinary collaborations across divisions and offices) and “vertical” (across geographic locations) cooperation resulted in improved coordination, planning and alignment of efforts within the Organization. The measures also contributed to leverage synergies and complementarities with external partners.
- Involving local communities in analysis and decision-making processes, as well as introducing monitoring mechanisms to address accountability to the beneficiaries strengthened the agency of those communities and improved outcome delivery.
- The implementation of its business continuity plan and derived practices mitigated the impact of the pandemic on FAO personnel and operations.

Lessons learned

- Assessing country situations in the context of lockdowns and travel bans proved challenging, in particular when gathering data on the needs of the marginalized communities and vulnerable groups.
- Vulnerable people did not often distinguish the impact of other shocks from that of COVID-19, requiring more integrated responses.
- The lack of monitoring information pertaining to the use and influence of knowledge products and data services limited the extent of follow-up actions.
- Strategic and comprehensive approach through the lens of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus would be more effective and sustainable in achieving desired outcomes. A comprehensive narrative, including well-defined change pathways and interventions that demonstrate the links to resilience outcomes may have led to efficient and sustainable interventions, and greater resource mobilization.
- Strengthening peoples’ agency requires integrating corresponding measures that address long-term needs and consequences such as participatory processes and inclusion in decision-making.

B. RTE Phase 2 ongoing country case studies

20. Currently, the ten country contribution analysis are underway. The country profiles below detail the respective RRP priority areas, budget and preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed in each of them. Upon completion, the country findings, good practices and lessons learned will be discussed with stakeholders to foster learning and improve programme implementation.

Bangladesh	
RRP Tagged Funding	USD 6 475 021
Preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed	
PA1: Global and Humanitarian Response Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's contribution to the overall reduction of COVID-19 impact supporting the improvement of rapid diagnostic testing and alternative sampling approaches at the household level through Community Support Team. ▪ The provision of emergency support to strengthen food security and nutrition of communities in Haor areas in Bangladesh through innovative food systems approaches for reducing the spread of COVID-19.
PA 3: Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to reduce Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's support to the construction of small-scale water management infrastructure for on-farm water management to overcome income deficits of smallholder farmers due to COVID-19.
PA5: Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's contribution to livelihood development of women and women-headed households through small-scale goat and poultry rearing in selected Bangladesh districts. FAO's support of diversification for improved nutrition and enhanced rural livelihood and agriculture productivity through nutrition-sensitive agrotechnologies.

Cabo Verde	
RRP Tagged Funding	USD 648 000
Preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed	
PA1: Global and Humanitarian Response Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strengthening beneficiary farmers' ability to support themselves and their families in times of crisis. Project beneficiaries and their family benefit from livelihood support and protection against the COVID-19 virus.
PA2: Data for Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government, technical and financial partners have reliable evidence for effective responses to the COVID-19 impact on agrifood systems and food security. Local farmers benefit from productivity gains and income generation during the pandemic.
PA 3: Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to reduce Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vulnerable families in Santiago Island gained financial independence and reinforced their purchasing power and autonomy.
PA5: Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business continuity supported for people working in nurseries during the pandemic. ▪ Financial independence strengthened and purchasing power improved for vulnerable families.

Cambodia	
RRP Tagged Funding	USD 1 940 554
Preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed	
PA2: Data for Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data on areas where the pandemic is causing new and unprecedented stress in food systems, livelihoods and food security. ▪ Examining data, information and analytic systems for effective COVID-19 crisis responses and recovery, as well as evidence-based policy support for post-COVID-19 economic and social recovery.
PA3: Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Food security and nutrition of COVID-19's most vulnerable households (smallholder farmers, returned migrant workers, unemployed casual labourers or workers and garment workers, with a special focus on women) is strengthened. ▪ A shift towards nutrition-sensitive, climate-resilient agriculture and food safety in two provinces – Siem Reap and Banteay Meanchey – is promoted.
PA4: Trade and Food Safety Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the context of COVID-19, the food safety measures and certification schemes for agricultural products such as good agricultural practices (GAP) and participatory guarantee systems (PGS) are supported, as well as the development and implementation of improved live-bird market biosecurity and biosafety and raising public awareness on hygiene.
PA7: Food Systems Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy advice and capacity building to improve Cambodia's enabling environment for greater food security and nutrition and long-term agriculture. The RTE will focus on issues exacerbated by COVID-19, such as nutrition, economic growth and stability.

Chad	
RRP Tagged Funding	USD 9 210 804
Preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed	
PA1: Global and Humanitarian Response Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's contribution to improving the food security of host households through the distribution of agricultural and livestock kits and livelihood activities.
PA2: Data for Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's national food security survey to assess the level of household food security and the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19.
PA7: Food Systems Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the context of COVID-19, FAO's contribution to the Parliamentary Front i) for the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; ii) for the sustainable increase and improvement of the supply of agricultural goods and services, forestry and fisheries; and iii) to facilitate more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international levels.

Egypt	
RRP Tagged Funding	USD 2 261 800
Preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed	
PA1: Global and Humanitarian Response Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's contribution to improving livelihoods, nutrition and empowerment of rural women and their families in Minya Governorate (linked to PA5).
PA2: Data for Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the food systems and food security in Egypt.
PA5: Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's contribution to improving livelihoods, nutrition and empowerment of rural women and their families in Minya Governorate (linked to PA1).
Priority area 7: Food Systems Transformation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness campaigns on COVID-19 in relation to food and agriculture (i.e. FAO developed a mobile application for food safety during COVID-19).

Honduras	
RRP Tagged Funding	USD 3 448 107
Preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed	
PA3: Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agricultural reactivation based on climate-smart, inclusive agriculture for women, youth and ethnic groups in the context of the COVID-19 emergency by empowering rural women and strengthening agrifood systems by promoting climate-smart agriculture and the provision of inputs, equipment and materials (linked to PA5 and PA7).
PA5: Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assistance to vulnerable livelihoods affected by the drought in the Dry Corridor: promoting resilience by providing inputs, equipment and materials for agricultural production, technical assistance, local capacity building and the establishment of community grain banks (linked to PA7). ▪ Livelihood recovery of smallholders affected by Hurricanes Eta and Iota by reactivating agricultural production, with the provision of inputs and materials to stimulate and improve productivity.
PA7: Food Systems Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing technical assistance for the production of family gardens and access to irrigation systems, land and agroforestry production systems (linked to PA3 and PA5).

Iraq	
RRP Tagged Funding	USD 1 073 000
Preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed	
PA 1: Global and Humanitarian Response Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's contribution to improving the resilience of agriculture livelihoods in Salah Al Din Governorate using a Cash+ scheme for out of camp internally displaced people impacted by COVID-19.
PA 4: Trade and Food Safety Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the food security and food supply chain to have information to support policy formulation, strategic planning and decision-making.
PA 7: Food Systems Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's contribution to promote Iraq's agricultural extension system by supporting digital innovation and capacity development in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic. This improved farmers' livelihoods by increasing the availability and quality of extension services, thus safeguarding agriculture production.

Kenya	
RRP Tagged Funding	USD 1 055 000
Preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed	
PA 3: Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to reduce Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inclusivity in economic empowerment ventures and evolution of supportive social norms, attitudes and behaviours. The RTE will explore how the interventions improved civic engagement, participation in decision-making, and political processes and institutions within Turkana and Kisumu Counties among women and youth beyond the prevention of gender-based violence.
PA5: Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Capacity building on innovative food systems integration across rural-urban communities for food security responsive to limited space across Nairobi and Kisumu. The RTE may assess the capacity building and consider the start-up kits and complementary initial support provided to the communities to gauge its effectiveness in addressing the pandemic challenges and food security.
PA7: Food Systems Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the context of COVID-19 and locust infestation, the alternatives in organizing food supply chain actors and designing food system that are responsive to the most acute food-insecure populations in the arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) Counties of Kenya. The RTE may explore information and tailored messaging to promote access to agricultural inputs and services as well as the technologies leveraged in Isiolo County.

Malawi	
RRP Tagged Funding	USD 4 804 917
Preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed	
PA1: Global and Humanitarian Response Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the agriculture and food sector in Malawi. Moreover, safety measures are adopted by beneficiary agriculture extension staff, community-based facilitators and other relevant stakeholders along the food value chains as a result of providing them with personal protective kits for basic protection against COVID-19.
PA2: Data for Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's support to the emergency agriculture and food security surveillance system (EmA-FSS) to provide information on rapid indicators to track the evolving dynamics in the country, which is necessary for decision-making and planning.
PA5: Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's contribution to building the capacity of beneficiary households to sustain themselves when faced with low productivity, low incomes and disrupted income chains. ▪ Support for farmers' access to agricultural extension services for informed good agricultural practices by using radio, print media, video, mobile vans and social media. ▪ FAO's guidance for extension workers to use when training farmer field schools.
PA7: Food Systems Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's contribution to raising COVID-19 awareness to the agricultural sector through radio stations mainstreaming COVID-19 messages with food diversification, hygiene and nutrition in its nutrition-centred radio programme. ▪ FAO's guidance on nutrition, breastfeeding and development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for carrying out nutrition interventions in the midst of the pandemic.
Tajikistan	
RRP Tagged Funding	USD 480 041
Preliminary list of contributions that may be assessed	
PA2: Data for Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FAO's assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on food systems and food security. ▪ FAO's assessment of veterinary clinics, slaughterhouses, animal farms, etc. in order to identify existing gaps with regard to COVID-19 prevention. ▪ Knowledge level of vets and specialists involved in slaughtering of animals, selling meat and meat products, milk collection points increased on prevention of COVID-19 and zoonosis.
PA6: Preventing the next zoonotic pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preparedness for prevention of COVID-19 and other zoonosis through evidence generated to formulate mitigation and preparedness measures; and building the capacity of the Committee for Food Security under the Government of Tajikistan to implement its national obligations to ensure food safety and prevention of zoonosis.
PA7: Food Systems Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Smallholders and rural poor's access to critical agricultural inputs (potato seeds, fertilizers) to produce the essential food during the pandemic and post-disaster recovery, and improve their livelihoods through increased yields and better production practices. ▪ FAO's contribution to making seed systems more resilient to crises supporting the livelihoods of farmers and other stakeholders to reduce dependence on seed imports.

C. RTE Phase 2 self-assessed contributions

21. The Office of Emergencies and Resilience (OER) submitted the following preliminary self-assessed case study of contributions and outcomes attained:

Title	Preventative health messaging
Priority Area(s) covered	PA1 – Global Humanitarian Appeal, component 4 – Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission
Geographic Coverage	Pakistan
Author(s)	FAO Pakistan, OER – Knowledge Sharing Platform on Resilience (KORE)
Office or Division	FAO Pakistan, OER

Introduction

22. In Pakistan, 60 percent of the population relies on agricultural livelihoods and resides outside urban centres. The agriculture sector contributes 18.5 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) but natural hazards, including earthquakes, flooding and drought, have presented persistent challenges to rural communities. Outbreaks of conflict, internal displacements and desert locust swarms have caused additional disruptions.
23. Even prior to the spread of COVID-19, one-fifth of the population (40 million people) remained food insecure. According to the 2020 Global Report on Food Crises, approximately 3.1 million people within drought-affected areas in Balochistan and Sindh are identified as being in Phase 3 or 4 of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, Crisis and Emergency. Rural poverty rates in these two provinces hover at close to 50 percent.
24. The global pandemic and its related containments deepened these pre-existing fault lines, highlighting the need for swift and inclusive messaging around good practices for managing and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 virus. Forty percent of Pakistan's population is unable to read or write, primarily within rural districts, which have the country's highest illiteracy rates. This created an added difficulty in communicating remotely with many of Pakistan's hardest-to-reach farming communities and in particular women.

Rationale

25. The intervention is linked to PA1 - Global Humanitarian Response Plan and addressed Component 4 of FAO's emergency response, ensuring food supply chain actors are at lower risk of virus transmission.
26. The continuing COVID-19 pandemic – and related lockdowns – triggered a massive cash crisis around the world for families who depend on informal earnings, including daily wage workers. In Pakistan, a nationwide lockdown was imposed on 21 March 2020. This had major reverberations on the food supply chain and agriculture sector, where restrictive measures threatened the livelihoods of workers and smallholder farmers. In total, as of 12 July 2020, there were 248 872 confirmed cases throughout Pakistan.
27. Lockdown-related challenges have created new threats to public health, with communities struggling to adhere to restrictions while still securing food for their families. Overall, society's most vulnerable and food-insecure segments have been disproportionately affected by the immediate impacts of lockdown measures, which include sudden unemployment, food price shocks, disruptions in marketing and food trade, logistics and production, and upended labour migration patterns.
28. FAO Pakistan, together with partners, delivered both physical and remote sensitization messages by harnessing the Farmer Field School (FFS) Platform to disseminate crucial information on virus prevention, including close to 80 000 materials printed and distributed by over 300 000 frontline workers. And along with livestock management, organic pesticides, kitchen gardens and climate-smart agriculture, the schools now emphasize COVID-19 mitigation practices, from routine

- handwashing to physical distancing guidelines. The trainings themselves are also being conducted at a distance, using popular messaging platforms to stream sessions and teach COVID-19 safe protocols.
29. COVID-19 sensitization was also complemented with remote communication technologies, ranging from social media posts, local radio broadcasts and newly modified online components to the FFS platform.
 30. The initiatives and interventions designed and implemented by FAO Pakistan are in full alignment with global good practice on risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) as prescribed in the FAO guidance note: “Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of COVID-19 transmission through risk communication and community engagement” developed to support Pillar IV of the country level activities foreseen under the framework of FAO’s component of the Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan.
 31. The first principle for effective RCCE is understanding the context and information needs. In Pakistan sensitization and information provision campaigns were carefully designed following community consultations to understand the context and information needs and ensure that the messaging was tailored to be effective in curbing the spread of the virus.
 32. Following this, the key messages on COVID-19 prevention for people along the food supply chain were developed based on the World Health Organization (WHO) and other relevant guidance. Moreover, appropriate channels and platforms for RCCE were selected. As with all effective RCCE campaigns, a number of different communication modalities and channels were adopted in order to be highly inclusive and participatory. These ranged from remote communication technologies (such as social media posts, local radio broadcasts, and newly modified online components to the farmer field school platform) to physically distanced field-based trainings. All initiatives were designed to be able to access hard-to-reach rural communities as well as a broad range of food supply chain workers, politicians and community leaders, and vulnerable groups, including religious or ethnic minorities, refugee and indigenous communities, and the chronically ill or disabled.
 33. Effective RCCE also requires meaningful engagement, partnerships and field level collaboration. In this case, FAO’s partnership with the Ministry of Health, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other UN agencies was instrumental for developing and distributing significant numbers of communication materials (e.g. posters and brochures), translated into local languages which were well displayed in supermarkets, local food shops and other public places.

Contribution analysis

34. The intervention targeted smallholder farmers and vulnerable households in Pakistan, primarily among remote agricultural populations.
35. FAO’s COVID-19 response options in Pakistan focused on targeted, preventative health messaging within an initial 8 to 12-week time frame and across a range of both digital media and broadcast platforms. These are being supplemented by physically distanced field-based trainings, all designed to access hard-to-reach rural communities, as well as a broad range of food supply chain workers, politicians and community leaders, and vulnerable groups, including religious or ethnic minorities, refugee and indigenous communities, and the chronically ill or disabled. Key features of the intervention include:
 - The development and distribution of over 80 000 information, education and communication 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 the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP).
 - The mobilization of at least eight digital influencers to create educational social media posts that both highlight information around COVID-19 and combat misinformation.

- Local radio broadcast slots featuring FAO’s technical expert recorded messages targeting FAO intervention districts within remote areas of Sindh province, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where television and digital media are not available.
- The planned production and dissemination of short animations² dubbed into local languages emphasized COVID-19 mitigation practices, including handwashing and physical distancing. These were shared via social media and WhatsApp, as well as via television broadcast slots.
- Online awareness sessions conducted by FAO field personnel now working from home, as well as the harnessing of FAO’s FFS 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 good practices.

Significant change (outcome) narrative

36. The assumption is that agriculture producers and food supply chain actors in Pakistan are at a reduced risk of virus transmission, as they know how to reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19 along the food production and supply chain, due to awareness raising campaigns in line with WHO guidance. As a beneficiary’s testimony exemplifies, FAO’s contributions have resulted in positive changes:

“My name is Summaya, we are a family of two brothers and three sisters. My brothers are farmers and my sister-in-law and I work here locally in our garden.

At first, when we learned about COVID-19, we did not believe in it. We started hearing about it on the news and on my brother’s mobile phone, but the effects of the virus were still so outlandish to us.

When the news first spread, we could not believe it. So many people had begun to die, and we began to take the virus seriously and started to take care of ourselves at home. Initially people would call it a conspiracy, but now we know that this isn’t true and the virus is very real.

When COVID-19 first started, we were at a loss as to how to deal with it. Everywhere we looked, we were being told to be aware, and then our community went into lockdown. My father is a farmer and my brother drives a rickshaw, taking children to school. Once we went into lockdown, my brother lost his job and was stuck at home, and we barely had any provisions at home.

Everyone was mentally distressed, and the FAO staff would periodically come to us and teach us how to keep safe, and raise awareness on using kitchen gardens to fulfil our nutrition as well as to earn our keep. During the early days of COVID-19, many people were dying because they wouldn’t take precautions and because hospitals began to close down.

² Animation videos already available online:

- Knowledge sharing as a tool for virus mitigation. YT|EN: <https://youtu.be/DemLVW8W-J8>
- The story of COVID-19: a pandemic meets other crises. How the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated existing challenges. YT|EN: <https://youtu.be/4UB4J3MlbOo>
- “We will keep moving forward”: nomadic pastoralists and COVID-19. Using resilience and ancestral knowledge to respond to the pandemic. YT|EN: <https://youtu.be/kUoPV1bBZDU>
- Knowledge on the move: RCCE messaging gets creative. A fast-paced look at sensitization typologies. YT|EN: <https://youtu.be/AeLvus-RZko>
- Dimitra Clubs and Farmer Field Schools face off against COVID-19. Leveraging the power of community groups. YT|EN: <https://youtu.be/Q0W3jIPx8TE>
- COVID-19 sensitization along the food supply chain: Sharing knowledge to keep rural communities at <https://www.fao.org/in-action/kore/covid-19/en/>

Some of the symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, headaches and nasal congestion, but we can take precautions such as wearing masks, gloves and keeping social distancing.

We also learned how to keep our dishes away from other people's dishes to prevent the virus from spreading.

If we ever had a fever or congestion, we would try to use home remedies to fix the problem because we didn't know any better.

COVID-19 caused a great deal of misery among our people. There was no food and we had to resort to begging on some occasions. I tried to help anyone I could, however I could. Using the surplus vegetables which I grew in my garden, I distributed food among some of my community members which helped them during this difficult time."

Good practices and lessons learned

37. Confirmed cases of COVID-19 rose exponentially in Pakistan in the first two months of the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting many rural populations within FAO intervention areas. As businesses began to reopen after the lockdown, there was increased urgency to mitigate the risk of a resurgence of the virus among food supply chain workers, including farmers, suppliers, vendors, rural communities and other stakeholders.
38. As indicated earlier, in Pakistan, around 40 percent of people are unable to read and write, especially in rural areas. Illiteracy rate is highest among Pakistani women, hovering at just over 50 percent and also concentrated in remoter districts. Coupled with rural women's more sedentary lifestyles, this created obstacles in targeting remote female audiences. Thus, **personalized, social media-based communications helped override this gendered information gap, additional programming for radio was developed**, including 18 radio programmes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over a nine-week interval. Five further radio spots, along **with public service announcements translated into local languages and recorded for television broadcast**, were played in each of Pakistan's five provinces and shared by FAO's digital channels.
39. In addition to the 80 000 posters already distributed throughout public spaces, 11 000 new copies of the information posters were disseminated within the remotest districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
40. As the harvest season approached, **the intervention was upscaled to include standard operating procedure infographics, translated into local languages and made using easy-to-understand visuals, and linked to food safety and safe harvesting. These were shared through digital media platforms and on WhatsApp. Further interventions also targeted youth, small business owners and women for information dissemination on COVID-19 safe practices.**
41. Since the beginning of the campaign, **extensive research within communities was conducted regularly to ensure that the interventions carried out were in line with evolving issues and that the messaging was tailored to be effective in curbing the spread of the virus.**
42. **Interventions initially piloted within a single intervention district were replicated and operationalized throughout every province in Pakistan**, as well as carried out by partner agencies.
43. The interventions were designed with illiterate rural populations in mind and to allow its replication in areas with similar demographics and in communities facing similar challenges.
44. **The FAO model for the targeted messaging of rural populations has been included in the national risk communication and community engagement strategy**, currently being implemented by the Ministry of Health, with rural populations and smallholder farmers identified as priority groups for information dissemination.