



## **Rome-based Agencies COVID-19 Response**

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WFP Executive Board  
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## **I. Purpose**

1. The United Nations Rome-based agencies (RBAs) – the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and World Food Programme (WFP) – have undertaken to provide their Member States with an update on their respective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. This document thus represents a compilation of contributions of all three RBAs based on their agency-specific response to the pandemic. All three agencies have tackled this exceptionally challenging period by adapting and improving existing structures to secure the delivery of their individual mandates and joint endeavours, for instance, through undertaking joint RBA assessments. From the reallocation of funds to strategic planning, each agency has committed time and resources to ensure that the most vulnerable continue to receive the attention and support necessary. The RBAs are committed to confronting the challenges imposed by the pandemic, and to working together to come up with innovative solutions to carry out the 2030 Agenda. Outlined below is an account of their collaborative and individual work to this end, as well as lessons learned in combating those challenges thus far.

## **II. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations COVID-19 response**

2. To mitigate the pandemic's impact on food and agriculture, FAO has led a comprehensive COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme across the following seven areas of work:
  - (i) Global humanitarian response planning;
  - (ii) Data for decision-making;
  - (iii) Economic inclusion and social protection to reduce poverty;
  - (iv) Trade and food safety standards;
  - (v) Boosting smallholder resilience for recovery;
  - (vi) Preventing the next zoonotic pandemic through an extended One Health approach; and
  - (vii) Food systems transformation.
3. The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme leverages the organization's convening power, real-time data, early warning systems and technical expertise to direct support where and when it is most needed.
4. Crucially, the organization produced a number of policy briefs and analytical reports as substantive contributions to the report of the United Nations Secretary-General, to ensure inclusion of the food and agriculture sectors. The reports covered topics and issues emerging from the countries affected by the pandemic, including policy and technical assistance in support of national governments and partners, as well as evidence-based recommendations for concrete action to reduce the impact of current restrictions on agrifood systems.
5. As critical components of FAO's COVID-19 response, it has produced key market monitoring analysis and communications on implications for the demand and supply of agricultural commodities to provide early warning and advice on appropriate measures at national, regional and global levels.
6. Through constant monitoring of policy responses to COVID-19, FAO supported the functioning of agrifood production and markets and issued warnings on increased acute and chronic food insecurity, mainly as a result of the global recession. The organization has underscored the need to support women, as the hardest hit group

given their multiple roles in the household and their predominant participation in informal agrifood markets.

7. As soon as the pandemic arose, an umbrella programme was set up for response and recovery, focusing on the seven priority areas of work indicated above. These priorities were defined on the basis of concrete needs on the ground and in close consultation with national governments through FAO's decentralized offices. Through this programme FAO has adopted a comprehensive and holistic approach to proactively addressing the socio-economic impact of the pandemic in addition to the emergency and humanitarian response, providing concrete, demand-driven support to Members.
8. To fund the umbrella programme, with operational requirements of US\$1.32 billion, contributions were sought from Members. As of September 2021, confirmed and pledged contributions totalling US\$368 million had been received, or approximately 28 per cent of the target. Voluntary contributions – destined for both development and emergency-oriented projects – amount to US\$334 million. FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme core resources have been used to contribute US\$30 million, with an additional US\$1.85 million from multidisciplinary funds.
9. The programme has had a significant impact. As the pandemic unfolded, FAO reacted quickly to adjust its humanitarian programming and integrate the activities into ongoing humanitarian response plans in coordination with other key stakeholders. By placing people at the centre of these efforts, FAO was able to adapt and reprogramme existing resources to reach almost 24 million acutely food-insecure people under threat from COVID-19. For example, in Afghanistan, FAO adapted its targeted support to pastoralists, one of the most vulnerable groups in the region. In addition to the usual activities, FAO redesigned its programme to address both direct and secondary effects of the virus with support for COVID-19 safety measures at livestock markets and on-the-ground sensitization activities, the dissemination of risk communication and community engagement materials, and contingency planning for safe transhumance to winter pastures for pastoralists.
10. Highlights of the FAO response regarding data for decision-making: (i) rapid assessments of the impact of COVID-19 on food insecurity; (ii) innovative data sources to monitor the impact of COVID-19; (iii) adaptive agricultural data collection methods; and (iv) evidence-based policy support for post-COVID recovery. Food security assessments and rapid data collection efforts were conducted in over 20 countries based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale. In addition, FAO provided urgent support to at least 30 countries and institutions in collection and analysis of food insecurity data to monitor the impact of COVID-19. Regarding innovative data sources, FAO's Data Lab launched a big data tool in mid-April 2020, as an automated interactive platform publishing real-time information updated on a daily basis. The tool scrapes daily food prices, tweets and news to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on food chains. All data is easily accessible and searchable.
11. Highlights of the FAO response regarding rural livelihoods: FAO rapidly responded to adverse effects of the pandemic and promoted urgent inclusive economic recovery by supporting an expansion of social protection to better reach underserved groups; ensuring tenure rights and strengthening sustainable economic inclusion of small-scale producers; protecting the right to food and rural employment; strengthening rural women's economic empowerment; and building evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on the rural livelihoods of vulnerable rural populations.
12. Highlights from the FAO response regarding trade and food safety: FAO has intensified its analytical work on the impact of COVID-19 on food and agricultural trade, both globally and at the regional level. Provided upon urgent demand, this included e-training on food safety, fisheries and food loss and waste; and the

linkages between trade and food security and agriculture in international trade agreements.

13. Highlights from the FAO response regarding One Health: FAO, together with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Health Organization, monitors the high-level global COVID-19 situation at the animal-human interface, sharing information through the Global Early Warning System (GLEWS +), providing updates and conducting risk assessments. Together with the United Nations Environment Programme, the tripartite is committed to enhance the collaboration for advancing a comprehensive One Health approach at all levels. The One Health High-Level Expert Panel was launched in May 2021 to provide evidence-based scientific and policy advice to address One Health challenges.
14. **Lessons learned:** It is essential to create stronger linkages between short, medium and long-term policy decisions and measures, ensuring that recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is inclusive within national planning and investment, with a strong focus on the most vulnerable groups: women, youth and indigenous peoples. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, highlighting the need for policies and strategies to address the related structural issues.
15. The key role of digital technologies is increasingly apparent, and universal access to broadband service should be promoted.

### **III. International Fund for Agricultural Development COVID-19 response**

16. IFAD's COVID-19 response has been structured around three main pillars: (i) repurposing project funds; (ii) establishing the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF); and (iii) providing policy and analytical support. Cutting across these pillars, high priority has been given to collaboration with governments, and to combining support and expertise with the RBAs and other development partners.
17. **Repurposing project funds:** This channel has served as the fastest means for IFAD to provide COVID-response support to the rural poor. It involves reallocating funds within existing IFAD projects (mainly funds not assigned to a specific project component) to finance COVID-19 support activities. While some of the funds were used to support existing project beneficiaries, in other cases project infrastructure was employed to reach new beneficiaries. Key examples include US\$24 million in repurposed funding for two projects in Cambodia to finance basic production assets (mainly irrigation) and digital financial services, and US\$15 million in repurposed funding for a project in Ethiopia to enable financial institutions to mitigate the threats to the cash flow of project beneficiaries.
18. In 2020 and early 2021, IFAD repurposed a total of US\$179 million, spanning 58 projects in 36 countries. Approximately 45 per cent of these funds has been used to give farmers access to inputs, 32 per cent to support access to financial services, 16 per cent to support access to markets (including transport and storage), and around 5 per cent to support access to digital services for e-marketing and information. A further US\$43 million, across 11 projects in 11 countries, remains in the pipeline, either awaiting approval or still under discussion with governments.
19. **Rural Poor Stimulus Facility:** While repurposing has allowed funds to be used quickly within existing IFAD projects, the RPSF, established in April 2020, allows new resources to be mobilized and channelled into tailored COVID-19 response projects, with all projects to be completed by December 2021 (now extended to June 2022). The facility provides support under four pillars: (i) provision of inputs and basic assets for production; (ii) facilitated access to markets; (iii) targeted funds to preserve services, markets and jobs for poor rural people; and (iv) delivery of agriculture-related information through digital services. A

streamlined approval process ensures that projects are approved as quickly as possible while still undergoing appropriate scrutiny. All proposals must have been developed in collaboration with the government and the United Nations Country Team, and have explored opportunities to collaborate with the RBAs and other development partners. Opportunities to cofinance initiatives with the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund were also explored where possible, resulting in a large project in the Pacific Region and a project in Eswatini.

20. IFAD provided US\$40 million in seed funding for the facility from its grants programme, which was combined with a further US\$52.5 million in contributions from the Governments of Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. Funds for the facility are split into two pots, with 85 per cent allocated to single-country projects for 59 eligible countries (determined based on their rural population, food security and INFORM COVID-19 Risk Index score); and 15 per cent allocated to multi-country projects.
21. To date, US\$75.3 million has been approved across 55 single-country and eight multi-country projects, in addition to US\$19.3 million in cofinancing from sources including the RBAs, implementing partners and recipient governments. The remaining funds will be fully allocated by early October. Of these approved funds, 44 per cent has been allocated to meet farmers' urgent input needs for the upcoming planting seasons, 26 per cent to improve market access, 10 per cent for rural finance and 20 per cent for digital services.
22. As shown in the table below, over half of the RPSF funding has been allocated to low-income countries, while 63 per cent has been allocated to sub-Saharan Africa and 18 per cent to Asia and the Pacific. In addition, approximately US\$35 million (46 per cent) has gone to countries with fragile situations.

23. The total approved RPSF financing of US\$75.3 million breaks down as follows by income category and region:

<i>Income classification</i>		<i>Region</i>	
Low-income	39.2 (52%)	Asia and the Pacific	13.9 (18%)
Lower-middle-income	32.0 (42%)	East and Southern Africa	23.7 (31%)
Upper-middle-income	4.1 (6%)	Latin America and the Caribbean	4.8 (7%)
		Near East, North Africa, and Europe	8.8 (12%)
		West and Central Africa	24.1 (32%)

24. **Policy and analytical support:** IFAD has supported national COVID-19 responses in 46 countries by providing policy and analytical support, often in collaboration with the RBAs and other partners. Most of this support has involved helping to conduct rapid assessments of the situation in the agriculture or rural sector, looking in particular at the challenges faced by women and youth, and providing recommendations for government policymaking. In terms of focus, most of the initiatives have a relatively broad scope, while some target specific areas. Examples of the latter include an analysis in Côte d'Ivoire to assess how COVID-19 will influence the ongoing meat price crisis in the country, and a study in India of the specific threats to livelihoods in a post-lockdown setting.
25. Some other key examples include a diagnostic assessment in the Plurinational State of Bolivia to determine the impact of COVID-19 on agrifood systems, conducted by IFAD in collaboration with the RBAs and private sector actors. The analysis enabled the Plurinational State of Bolivia to be one of the first countries in the world to have a diagnosis and recovery plan in place. Another example is the policy support provided to the Pacific Region, which helped to inform COVID-19 response strategies and also pioneered the use of innovative digital technologies to assess COVID-19 impacts. These technologies included a crowdsourcing application collecting information on food prices sold in different formal and informal market

outlets. Through this application, 30,184 market price data points and 3,761 photos were collected in a single month, helping to identify changes in prices and the practices of customers and vendors, which can then inform the design and targeting of response activities. Finally, in Turkey, a rapid impact assessment by IFAD is feeding directly into an upcoming e-marketing project based on a mobile and public block chain, which will aim to address market distortions by bringing together suppliers and buyers of agricultural products.

26. Some of the publications that have resulted from this support are listed below:
- **Bangladesh:** Second Rapid Assessment of Food and Nutrition Security in the Context of COVID-19 in Bangladesh;
  - **Bolivia (Plurinational State of):** National Response and Rehabilitation Plan for the Agricultural Sector;
  - **Ethiopia:** One UN Assessment: Socio-economic Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 in Ethiopia;
  - **Fiji:** Impact Survey of COVID-19 and Agriculture;
  - **Iraq:** Food Security in Iraq: Impact of COVID-19;
  - **Jordan:** Jordan Food Security Update: Implications of COVID-19; and
  - **Lao People's Democratic Republic:** Rapid Assessment of Food Security and Agriculture in LAO PDR.
27. **Key lessons learned: Rapid response through repurposing.** In IFAD's experience this has proved the quickest way to channel funds for rapid disaster response. With project implementation units already functioning, unallocated funds can be used quickly for tailored support, employing project targeting tools to identify those most in need. Accordingly, for COVID-19 and beyond, it may be prudent to build in a flexible project component for disaster-response activities in contexts where they may be needed.
28. **Working with nongovernmental partners:** Experience with the RPSF, in particular, has shown that working with NGOs, farmer organizations and the private sector can often enable support to be provided to the hardest hit both quickly and efficiently, and should therefore be leveraged in response to future shocks. These implementing partners have provided a valuable complement to government partners, whose capacity has been stretched during the pandemic.
29. **Investing in digital technologies:** Given their ability to overcome restrictions on movement and gatherings, digital technologies are proving to be a valuable tool in IFAD's COVID-19 response. Through the RPSF and repurposing, IFAD has taken the opportunity to invest in technologies that can provide short-term support through the pandemic, in addition to offering the potential to contribute to more modern and efficient rural livelihoods in the longer term. This has included mainly scaling up existing mobile phone platforms for e-marketing (for inputs and outputs), market and weather information, and e-extension. The key for IFAD moving forward will be capturing lessons in this area and using them to better integrate information and communications technologies for development (ICT4D) support across the portfolio.
30. **Opportunities for enhanced RBA collaboration:** Across all the pillars of COVID-19 response, IFAD has benefited extensively from collaboration with the RBAs and other development partners. Each partner has drawn upon their comparative advantage to provide efficient and coordinated support to the rural poor – as cofinanciers, implementing partners, research partners, tool sharers and collaborators in project design. In addition to the activities under the three pillars, collaborative efforts have also borne fruit in the form of emergency loans providing COVID-19 support in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, the Joint Programme for the Sahel

in Response to the Challenges of COVID-19, Conflict and Climate Change, and several successful joint proposals with other United Nations agencies involved in the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund. Given the long-lasting impact that COVID-19 will have on rural livelihoods and food security, IFAD will build on this experience and the synergies created to continue and scale up such collaboration moving forward.

#### **IV. World Food Programme COVID-19 response**

31. The unprecedented global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had a drastic impact on WFP's operational environment and that of its local, national and international partners. Almost overnight, staff working conditions, global supply chains and commercial transport markets were severely strained by measures introduced to contain the spread of COVID-19. To ensure the continuity of existing humanitarian operations and provide additional capacity to its field offices, WFP activated a level 3 corporate surge emergency. This contributed to WFP's capacity to maintain exceptionally strong levels of programme and management performance, while facilitating tremendous agility and speed in responding to the unparalleled situation.
32. WFP adapted and scaled up its operations in three significant ways. First, it sustained ongoing operations and assistance for existing beneficiaries by rapidly deploying staff to fill critical gaps in the field, pre-positioning food stocks and increasing local purchases. Second, assistance was scaled up to reach new beneficiaries on the brink of food insecurity owing to the pandemic, including by expanding direct assistance into urban areas, which accounted for 90 per cent of COVID-19 cases. Near real-time remote monitoring methods were used to assess needs. Third, governments and humanitarian partners were supported and enabled in responding effectively to COVID-19 through the provision of technical assistance and logistics support. In particular, WFP expanded support for national social protection systems.
33. WFP also rapidly launched a global programme for improving connectivity in the field, including further improvements in the capacity and reliability of its digital beneficiary and transfer management platform. These initiatives allowed staff to stay and deliver, while addressing the pandemic's increased risks to their personal health, safety and security as they moved from working in offices to working remotely.
34. These actions were underpinned by reliance on management assurance reviews, internal control and risk management processes and flexible funding arrangements that responded to the unpredictable environment. WFP's long-standing investments in digital transformation, telecommunications, global service centres such as the humanitarian booking hub, the online emergency service marketplace and surge staffing arrangements ensured the adaptive continuity of operations. Moreover, as employees worldwide faced personal or family challenges caused by COVID-related restrictions, WFP rapidly adapted its workforce rules, procedures and services, balancing the duty of care for its staff with the need for business continuity. Extended benefits were provided to all employees worldwide, including medevacs and field clinics and flexible working arrangements, where appropriate.
35. Leveraging its experience in responding to Ebola outbreaks and its extensive supply chain capacity, WFP reacted swiftly to address the severe impacts caused by COVID-19 on global supply chains and commercial transport markets by establishing common services for enabling health and humanitarian workers to continue their critical work. WFP transported nearly 27,000 essential personnel from 415 organizations, and more than 135,000 m<sup>3</sup> of cargo, while also providing COVID-19 medevac support for humanitarian staff and their dependants.



36. From May 2020, WFP's interventions to assist affected communities, national governments and partners to build back better from the impacts of COVID-19 were guided by the organization's medium-term programme framework. Informed by the 2030 Agenda and the United Nations framework for the socio-economic response to COVID-19, this framework set out the approach for WFP and partners to provide tailored support in three areas: national social protection systems and the delivery of basic services; school-based programmes and nutrition; and food systems.
37. WFP also contributed to the Secretary-General's initiatives for guiding the United Nations system's health, socio-economic and humanitarian response to the pandemic. The Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 (GHRP) was launched to help the 63 worst-hit countries contain the spread of the virus and address the immediate humanitarian consequences. Nearly one third of the US\$10.3 billion received through this appeal was devoted to addressing the expected surge in global food insecurity. Two of the GHRP's key areas are overseen by WFP: famine prevention (US\$500 million) and provision of common services for the health and humanitarian community (US\$965 million).
38. As part of its contribution to the formulation of the United Nations development system's socio-economic response framework for helping countries to recover from COVID-19, WFP co-drafted the social protection pillar. The framework calls on global and regional experts and United Nations country teams to "work as one" throughout the response in supporting health services, social protection, jobs, fiscal and financial stimulus, social cohesion and community resilience. Through its participation in the advisory committee of the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund and involvement in drafting the Secretary-General's policy brief on the impacts of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition, WFP also helped to ensure an effective and consistent approach to addressing food security issues within the wider response.
39. **Evaluation of WFP's response to the COVID-19 pandemic:** In January 2021, WFP launched an independent Evaluation of WFP's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The evaluation will cover all aspects of WFP's adaptation to the COVID-19 response – organizational and programmatic – that were undertaken between January 2020 and June 2021. It will use 2019 as a baseline year when examining changes in WFP's programmatic and organizational arrangements.
40. The evaluation will focus on adaptive capacity and adopt elements of a developmental evaluation paradigm to assess changes in WFP's complex, dynamic operations as the organization responded to the pandemic. This will take into account the myriad pressures facing country offices. Moreover, the evaluation will build on a recent evaluation of WFP's capacity to respond to emergencies by assessing the extent to which WFP effectively and efficiently responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of both: (i) programming and operations; and (ii) institutional systems, structures and staffing. As part of this focus, why and under which conditions WFP's adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic helped increase the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, sustainability, coverage and impact of its operations and partnerships will be assessed.
41. In addition, the evaluation will complement other oversight and learning exercises under way in 2020-2021, including internal audits and lessons learned exercises and joint evaluations of global frameworks like the GHRP. Emerging lessons learned from internal exercises includes increasing internal capacity by deploying field-experienced and emergency-ready staff under a "no-regrets" approach to meet the demands of large-scale, unexpected global emergencies.
42. **Lessons learned:** The evaluation findings and learnings will be presented to WFP's Executive Board in February 2022.