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Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA)

Annual report 2020



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Contents

Executive summary	v
Background	1
SFERA set-up	2
SFERA resources	3
Use of SFERA funds.	4
Working capital component.	5
Revolving fund component	7
Programme component	10
Conclusions	22

Executive summary

The **Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA)** enables the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to take rapid and effective action in response to food and agricultural threats and emergencies.

SFERA has three components:

- a working capital component to advance funds once a resource partner's commitment is secured toward the immediate procurement of inputs to protect livelihoods, restart agricultural activities or contribute to an immediate response to a crisis;
- a revolving fund component to support FAO's involvement in needs assessment and programme development, early establishment and reinforcement of emergency country team capacities, Level 3 emergency¹ preparedness and response activities; and
- a programme component, which pools resources in support of a programme framework for large-scale emergencies or strategically complements ongoing programmes through the Agricultural Inputs Response Capacity (AIRC) window, as well as early actions triggered by corporate early warnings.

From its inception in 2004 through 31 December 2020, SFERA received USD 311.9 million, of which:

- USD 152.4 million were allocated to large-scale programmes (e.g. locust response, sudden onset disasters, El Niño response, highly pathogenic avian influenza, protracted crises and coronavirus disease 2019);
- USD 62.6 million were disbursed under the AIRC window;
- USD 32.9 million were used to set up or reinforce country office emergency response capacities and support needs assessments and programme formulation;
- USD 13.7 million were allocated to the Level 3 emergencies preparedness and response window; and
- USD 12.5 million to the anticipatory action window.

Since SFERA's inception, under its working capital component, USD 472.1 million have been advanced to fund immediate emergency projects, of which USD 59.7 million were advanced over the reporting period. Outstanding advances as at 31 December 2020 amounted to USD 9.7 million.

SFERA's cash balance as at 31 December 2020 was USD 28.1 million. This relatively low balance reflects the high level of advances made in support of the desert locust control operations, which continue in all affected countries.

¹ Sudden onset, large-scale disasters and crises that require a corporate response.



Background

During its Hundred and Second Session in May 2003, the Finance Committee supported the creation of the Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA), with the purpose to “enable the Organization to rapidly initiate emergency operations by participating in interagency needs assessment and coordination activities, establishing an emergency coordination unit, preparing a programme framework and projects, and providing advance funding for procurement of inputs when a donor’s commitment has been obtained.”²

This annual report provides a brief description of the major operations initiated with SFERA funds for the 12-month period ending 31 December 2020. The report contains financial data for this period, as well as data since the Fund became operational.

² FC 102/14



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SFERA set-up

SFERA has three components:

- **Working capital component:** to advance funds, once a resource partner’s commitment is secured, toward the immediate procurement of inputs to protect livelihoods, restart agricultural activities or contribute to an immediate response to a crisis.
- **Revolving fund component:** to support the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations’ (FAO) involvement in needs assessment, programme development, early establishment and reinforcement of emergency country team capacities, Level 3 emergency³ preparedness and response activities.
- **Programme component:** to support work on specific large-scale emergency programmes, or strategically complement ongoing programmes through the Agricultural Inputs Response Capacity (AIRC) window, as well as anticipatory actions triggered by corporate early warnings.

Table 1. SFERA components and windows

Working capital component	Revolving fund component	Programme component
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advances to enable rapid response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency coordination and response capacity window • Needs assessment and programme development window • Level 3 emergency preparedness and response window 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large-scale programme window (e.g. sudden onset disasters, highly pathogenic avian influenza, the Sahel, El Niño, protracted crises and coronavirus disease 2019 [COVID-19]) • AIRC window • Anticipatory action window

The **working capital component** reduces the reaction time to emergencies by enabling FAO to initiate activities and purchase the most critical assets before funding from resource partners is received. By enabling a rapid response, this component helps to mitigate the impact of threats and emergencies and hasten the recovery of those affected.

The **revolving fund component** supports the efforts of FAO’s emergency country teams to identify the most critical needs of affected populations, strengthen response capacity, and develop and coordinate technically sound response programmes. Through the Level 3 emergency preparedness and response window, FAO can prepare for and respond to the extraordinary challenges facing the agriculture sector during a Level 3 emergency.

The **programme component** facilitates faster and more programmatic assistance that can be tailored to evolving needs on the ground. SFERA’s pooled funding approach provides the flexibility to adjust activities and support according to the geographical and thematic areas of greatest need. Likewise, the programme approach enables operations to adapt as the situation changes, streamlining activities to ensure the most appropriate assistance reaches affected populations sooner. The programme component also includes the AIRC window that channels pooled funds towards the immediate procurement and delivery of time-critical inputs. With the anticipatory action window, FAO is enabled to act early once an impending threat has been identified, before disaster losses are sustained in the agriculture sector or livelihoods compromised.

³ Sudden onset, large-scale disasters and crises that require a corporate response.

SFERA resources

Receipts. Since SFERA's inception in April 2004, the Fund has received a total of USD 311.9 million. Of this amount, USD 224 million were provided by the Members listed in Table 2, including USD 8.5 million provided by resource partners that transferred the balances of closed emergency projects to SFERA. During the 12 months that ended on 31 December 2020, deposits to SFERA amounted to USD 62.8 million. The main contributions in 2020 came from the contributions made for the desert locust operations.

Table 2. SFERA funding receipts (as of 31 December 2020)

Contributors	Since inception USD (000)	January–December 2020 USD (000)
Australia	107	0
Austria	1 131	0
Belgium	62 365	7 404
Canada	11 139	1 556
Chile	5	0
China	500	0
Czechia	36	0
Finland	3 747	0
France	9 272	303
Germany	2 317	1 013
Greece	227	0
Ireland	7 424	1 195
Italy	1 490	0
Japan	430	0
Jordan	60	0
Kuwait	50	0
Lao People's Democratic Republic	14	0
Luxembourg	8	0
Malta	11	11
Monaco	59	0
Netherlands	9 679	5 217
New Zealand	13	0
Norway	34 472	0
Saudi Arabia	1 377	0
South Africa	452	0
Spain	520	0
Sweden	3 5487	4 904
Switzerland	4 942	3
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	36 688	27 349
Holy See	30	0
Others (less than 5 000)	37	0
Total Members	224 089	48 955
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation	10 000	10 000
DOC/Opec Fund	76 847	3 345
Louis Dreyfus Foundation	108	108
Total United Nations	896	391
Total received	311 940	62 799

Source: FAO, 2021; Compiled from subsidiary records and agreed to the general ledger

Use of SFERA funds

Under the working capital component, USD 472.1 million were advanced to projects after resource partners' commitment, but before receiving the cash contributions. Of this amount, USD 9.7 million remain outstanding, pending receipt of resource partner funds.

Of the USD 311.9 million contributed, USD 46.7 million were approved under the revolving fund component (USD 4.9 million during the reporting period). A total of USD 227.4 million was allocated under the programme component, of which USD 152.4 million were disbursed under the thematic and regional window. The use of the funds is detailed in Table 3.

Table 3. Funding components

Component	Since inception (USD 000)	January–December 2020 (USD 000)
Advances		
Working capital component		
Total advances made during the period	472 122	59 730
Refunds on advances paid during the period	462 437	50 310
Outstanding advances	9 685	
Applications		
Emergency coordination unit setup and reinforcement	18 070	2 713
Needs assessment and programme development missions	14 862	2 206
Level 3 emergency preparedness and response	13 747	0
Total revolving fund component	46 679	4 919
Programme component		
AIRC	62 618	9 131
Anticipatory action	12 496	2 800
Thematic and regional window		
Desert locust campaign	49 091	44 109
Avian influenza campaign	45 928	0
Typhoon and hurricane	15 598	0
Horn of Africa (regional programmes)	13 748	0
Tsunami campaign	10 002	0
Protracted crisis	4 786	0
El Niño	4 552	0
The Sahel (regional programmes)	3 552	0
COVID-19	2 934	2 934
Initiative on soaring food crisis	1 168	0
Fall armyworm	1 001	0
Subtotal thematic and regional window	152 360	47 043
Subtotal programme components	227 474	58 974
Grand total applications	274 153	63 893
SFERA balance	28 100	

Working capital component

Advances. During the reporting period, 70 percent of SFERA advances was in support of projects funded from four resource partners, as shown in Table 4. Once a resource partner's commitment is secured, funds are allocated towards the immediate procurement of inputs to protect livelihoods, restart agricultural activities or contribute to an immediate response to a crisis.

Table 4. SFERA advances from resource partners

Resource partner	Advances (USD 000)	Refunds (USD 000)
United States of America	18 540	18 540
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	9 500	9 500
European Commission	8 580	500
World Bank	5 200	4 150
Germany	5 150	5 050
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation	4 000	4 000
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	3 200	3 200
Norway	1 000	1 000
African Development Bank	1 000	1 000
Switzerland	900	900
China	800	800
Canada	750	750
Denmark	720	720
Sweden	335	150
Japan	50	50
World Food Programme	5	0
Total	59 730	50 310

Advances mainly supported major programmes in Afghanistan, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan, representing more than 93 percent of all advances between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2019, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. SFERA advances for country programmes

Country	Advances (USD 000)	Refunds (USD 000)
Global	*36 100	**29 500
Somalia	8 345	7 245
South Sudan	5 541	5 541
Afghanistan	3 550	3 550
Yemen	1 455	405
Nigeria	1 385	1 200
Sudan	1 000	1 000
Ethiopia	800	800
Subregional West Africa	720	720
Viet Nam	480	0
Iraq	145	145
Interregional	100	100
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	50	50
Bangladesh	50	50
Pakistan	5	0
Uganda	5	5
Total	59 730	50 310

* Mainly allocations to desert locust activities (USD 35 450);** Mainly allocations to desert locust activities (USD 28 950)

In 2020, the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Southwest Asia faced the worst **desert locust crisis** in decades. The migratory pest had damaged hundreds of thousands of hectares of cropland and pasture, an upsurge that represented an unprecedented threat to food security and livelihoods, particularly where food security was already fragile. Thanks to SFERA Advances, FAO rapidly responded to the crisis by conducting extensive ground and aerial surveillance and control operations to protect agricultural production. SFERA Advances also enabled FAO to deploy surge support; strengthen local, regional and national capacity to combat the pest; and enhance coordination and preparedness. Under the SFERA working capital component, FAO advanced USD 41.4 million, including USD 29 million from 28 February to 6 April 2020 while grant agreements were being signed, an approach that allowed FAO to supply a number of assets before lockdowns were imposed due to COVID-19. In addition, a loan of USD 10 million was approved by the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund to ensure control operations were fully funded and operational.

The main drivers of the protracted humanitarian crisis in **Somalia** continued to be climate shocks (droughts and floods), poverty, political instability, conflict and a lack of basic social services, which had pushed over 6 million people into acute food insecurity by the end of 2019. To address immediate needs and improve livelihoods and productive capacity, FAO employed SFERA Advances to swiftly provide vulnerable families with cash transfers alongside agricultural, livestock and fisheries inputs (cash+). FAO also built community resilience utilizing the Somalia Water and Land Information Management system, which contributed to flood and drought risk reduction and preparedness. Moreover, FAO strengthened the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit by facilitating the training of government staff on food security, nutrition and livelihood monitoring, assessment and analysis. SFERA Advances also allowed FAO to help build sustainable agricultural value chains.

Over 6 million people, more than half of the population in **South Sudan**, were expected to face acute food insecurity at the height of the annual hunger season in 2020, even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. To rapidly enhance the livelihoods and food security of vulnerable South Sudanese, FAO utilized SFERA Advances to provide households with crop, vegetable and fishing kits for both the main and second season. FAO also provided unconditional cash transfers through cash for work to allow families to buy seeds and distributed nutrition vouchers to help mothers buy vegetables, milk and fish at local markets to feed their families. Additionally, FAO supported urban families to improve their own nutrition by providing vegetable seeds and tools to establish home gardens. SFERA Advances were also used in South Sudan to reduce livestock mortality and improve production through large-scale vaccination and treatment campaigns and build the capacity of community animal health workers.

Decades of conflict and shocks, most significantly drought and floods, in **Afghanistan** has led to a crisis in which more than 13 million people were estimated to face acute food insecurity in 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to worsen the situation. With SFERA Advances, FAO mitigated the impacts of COVID-19 and the ongoing food crisis by providing wheat seed and fertilizers to marginal farming households. FAO also protected vulnerable groups, including Kuchis, landless labourers and female-headed households, against the spread of COVID-19 through the provision of personal protective equipment, hygiene kits and training on COVID-19 safety measures to adopt on farm, during transhumance and at local markets. Furthermore, livestock production packages, comprised of concentrated animal feed and fodder seed, and unconditional cash transfers were provided to pastoral households. FAO also strengthened the coordination of emergency food security response planning, implementation and monitoring by providing an inclusive common coordination platform to humanitarian actors in the country.

Revolving fund component

The **emergency coordination** window of SFERA's revolving fund component facilitates the rapid deployment of emergency experts, as well as the reinforcement of existing teams to support additional activities or fill short-term funding gaps. Table 6 shows the allocation of resources by country.

Table 6. Emergency coordination

Country	Approved allocation (USD 000)
Afghanistan	150
Armenia	9
Azerbaijan	6
Bangladesh	30
Cameroon	20
Central African Republic	32
Chad	25
China	85
Colombia	30
Democratic Republic of the Congo	40
Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Mali, Mozambique, Palestine, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Yemen	94
Ethiopia	56
Fiji and Vanuatu	50
Guinea Bissau	30
Haiti	139
Iraq	30
Kenya	99
Lao People's Democratic Republic	35
Lebanon	88
Libya	27
Nigeria	60
Pakistan	40
Subregional West Africa	100
Sudan	70
Syrian Arab Republic	100
Timor-Leste	66
Turkey	71
Ukraine	13
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	79
West Bank and Gaza Strip	167
Yemen	35
Total allotment	1 876

The **needs assessment and programme development** window of the revolving fund finances needs assessment activities at the onset of a crisis to support FAO and its partners in obtaining the information needed to formulate rapid response programmes as well as longer-term resilience strategies. During the reporting period, needs assessment and programme formulation exercises were implemented in the countries shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Needs assessment mission allocations

Country	Approved allocation (USD 000)
Afghanistan	95
Armenia	21
Azerbaijan	19
Bangladesh	20
Burkina Faso	69
Cameroon	28
Central African Republic	6
China	99
Colombia	66
Democratic Republic of the Congo	141
Ethiopia	25
Haiti	58
Honduras	60
Iraq	90
Lebanon	37
Liberia	31
Madagascar	98
Mali	43
Mozambique	25
Nicaragua	60
Niger	51
Nigeria	75
Sahel	20
Sierra Leone	55
Somalia	37
Sudan	77
Timor-Leste	35
Zimbabwe	41
Total allotment	1 482



The **Level 3 emergency preparedness and response** window was established under the revolving fund component following the Finance Committee’s endorsement at its Hundred and Forty-Seventh Session.⁴ This window focuses on (i) preparedness measures and activities strengthening FAO’s capacity to respond to large-scale emergency and (ii) Level 3 emergency response and corporate surge.

Preparedness

Under the “**Capacity building for Level 3 emergency preparedness**” area, simulation-based training on emergency preparedness and response could not be implemented as planned due to the restrictions in movement implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, two training of trainers (ToT) for the humanitarian sector were held, one at FAO headquarters in February 2020 just prior to the lockdown, and one conducted online in November 2020. The TOTs were specifically designed for FAO personnel working on FAO’s emergency and resilience programme, taking into account their unique learning and training needs. The training was delivered by an international non-governmental organization, REDR UK People and Skills for Disaster Relief (RedR UK). A total of 34 FAO personnel (from headquarters, Regional Office for Africa and Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa) benefited from the training. The training was overall rated as “very successful/excellent” and relevant to people’s work, and it was followed up by the facilitation of a community of practice. Other work supported by this area included COVID-19 response learning and reflection; scoping for a face-to-face anticipatory action training; support to the design and delivery of pilot introductory modules on emergency operations training. This area also supported the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) workshop held in January 2020 in an effort to spread the uptake of core MEL and processes for resilience related programming, which was a gap identified in recent emergency preparedness planning and capacity gap analyses.

Under the “**Organizational preparedness**” area, support was provided to the review of the internal emergency response preparedness tools (e.g. FAO Emergency Response Preparedness Plan), integration with other corporate tools (e.g. Country Annual Report) and interagency processes (e.g. Inter-Agency Emergency Response

⁴ FC 147/8

Preparedness Approach). Support was also provided to the integration of FAO’s preparedness and anticipatory action activities in the interagency Early Warning, Early Action and Readiness report and participation in interagency meetings on emergency response preparedness (e.g. Inter-Agency Standing Committee Results Group 1, inter-agency readiness group). In addition, support was provided for the development of strategic linkages between social protection and anticipatory action, which is key for risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection. The emergency preparedness and response area of the FAO Corporate Handbook was further expanded, making available online practical guidance and tools for emergency preparedness and response.

Response

Funds allocated under the “**Corporate surge and Level 3 emergency response**” area support FAO’s immediate response actions on a ‘no-regrets’ basis, which is defined as the commitment of resources in the absence of detailed needs assessments and response plans. During the reporting period, resources were approved on a ‘no-regrets’ basis for emergency response activities in support of the desert locust response and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Table 8. Corporate surge and Level 3 emergency response allotments

Corporate surge and Level 3 emergency response	Allotment USD (000)
Desert locust response	500
Democratic Republic of the Congo	500
Total	1 000

SFERA Level 3 funds allocated to the **desert locust response**, initiated in January 2020, were allocated to curbing the spread of the pest in the Greater Horn of Africa and Yemen, plus for an anticipatory approach in East Africa and the Sahel. This enabled equipment, services and experts to be fielded immediately, which facilitated the rapid initiation of surveillance and control efforts in the most affected countries.

SFERA Level 3 funds allocated to the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** in November 2020 allowed the country office to improve its operational capacity through the reinforcement of the logistics, procurement and operations teams. It also facilitated the decentralization of some administrative tasks through out-posting dedicated procurement staff at the Goma office. The fund also contributed to ensuring optimal working conditions for FAO staff in remote locations.

Programme component

Under the SFERA programme component, USD 9.1 million were allocated under the AIRC window, USD 2.8 million under the anticipatory action window.

Agricultural Inputs Response Capacity (AIRC) window

Under the AIRC window, USD 9.1 million were received from Belgium and Sweden. Contributions by these resource partners through this window have supported FAO’s country teams to respond quickly to large-scale crisis through the immediate procurement and delivery of time-critical inputs. The funds were allocated to 13 countries and one subregion in need of emergency agricultural assistance, which is a most critical humanitarian intervention, while developing a more programmatic response to crises.

Table 9. Funding provided under the AIRC window

Country	Type of intervention	Amount USD (000)
Afghanistan	Emergency agriculture assistance to food insecure and vulnerable marginal farming households impacted by COVID-19 and other recent shocks	450
Cabo Verde	Emergency assistance to restore the livelihoods of vulnerable farmers affected by the three-year drought and by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic	100
Ethiopia	Emergency livelihoods assistance to vulnerable herders in desert locust infestation risk areas	2 030
Ethiopia	Desert locust response in Ethiopia to mitigate impacts on food security and livelihoods	500
Fiji	Emergency assistance to re-establish livelihoods of households affected by Tropical Cyclone Harold	120
Haiti	Emergency response to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable households affected by drought and the socio-economic crisis in the North-East Department of Haiti	500
Lebanon	Emergency livelihood support to the vulnerable small-scale farmers affected by the financial and economic crisis	250
Lebanon	Support the effort of the Ministry of Agriculture of Lebanon towards controlling lumpy skin disease	100
Mali	Rapid restoration of the livelihoods of vulnerable households affected by insecurity and climatic hazards in central and northern Mali in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic	250
Niger	Emergency response to the food security and nutrition crisis and strengthening the resilience of households affected by the 2020 floods in the Niger	500
Niger	Protecting the livelihoods of vulnerable affected populations in Tahoua and Tillabér	250
Philippines	Emergency assistance to safeguard food security and livelihoods of vulnerable farmers and fishers in Catanduanes Province affected by Super Typhoon Goni	300
Somalia	Emergency livelihoods assistance to vulnerable pastoralists in desert locust infestation risk areas of Somalia	2 031
Subregional Southern Africa	African migratory locust emergency response to mitigate impacts on food security and livelihoods	500
Sudan	Restoring crop productive capacity and improving access to food of the most vulnerable flood-affected farmer households in Blue Nile and Kassala States of the Sudan	500
Syrian Arab Republic	Emergency support to vulnerable cattle breeders against lumpy skin disease	450
Viet Nam	Emergency agriculture assistance to food-insecure and vulnerable smallholder farming households impacted by the shock of the recent floods	300
Total		9 131

Afghanistan is suffering one of the most severe food crises worldwide as a result of over 40 years of conflict, displacements and droughts. The shock of the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the already dire situation, severely debilitating the coping capacities of vulnerable households across the country. With SFERA AIRC funding, FAO acted swiftly, providing wheat seed and fertilizers along with trainings on good agricultural practices. Trainings were also provided on COVID-19-safe approaches to farming and market participation. This assistance protected the agriculture-based livelihoods and improved the food security of vulnerable households in Logar Province where food insecurity is persistently high.

Cabo Verde has experienced three successive years of droughts since 2017, leading to poor harvests and causing farmers to exhaust their store of crop seed in 2020. To increase rainfed agricultural production in the 2020/21 season, FAO utilized SFERA AIRC funds to rapidly deliver season-sensitive maize and bean seed in advance



of rains. In addition, FAO's intervention contributed to protecting vegetation against the risk of damage by fall armyworm and the largest plague of local locusts that Cabo Verde has suffered in 50 years.

The 2020 outbreak of desert locust in **Ethiopia** was the most severe the country has experienced in 25 years. The pest had damaged 90 000 ha of land, threatening to worsen the food insecurity of vulnerable farming and herding communities. Enabled by SFERA AIRC funds, FAO quickly mobilized to support local control efforts by surveying and controlling swarms of locust, thereby, protecting crops and livelihoods. In addition, FAO provided supplementary animal feed to improve livestock production and cash transfers to strengthen the livelihoods vulnerable households in Somali Region of Ethiopia.

Tropical Cyclone Harold struck **Fiji** in April 2020, affecting thousands of people and causing damages and losses to crop and livestock amounting to USD 12.9 million. Following the cyclone and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, prices for agricultural products increased sharply, limiting access to affordable and nutritious food. With SFERA AIRC funds, FAO immediately helped farmers restore their livelihoods and improve their nutrition by providing them with planting materials, including vegetable and fruit seedlings, root crop cuttings and dry seeds, to re-establish agricultural production. Additionally, FAO provided poultry production packages that included chicks and feed to support vulnerable households to produce, manage and supply their own, safe, fresh and nutritious protein source.

Agricultural production in **Haiti** declined dramatically in 2020 as a result of the severe 2018 drought that extended into 2019 and from the ongoing political and economic crises. Families relying on the agriculture sector lost a significant share of their income and suffered high rates of acute food insecurity; from October 2019 to February 2020, some 3.67 million people were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Using SFERA AIRC funds, FAO reached the most vulnerable drought-affected farmers in the Northwest, Grande Anse and West Departments through the distribution of (i) vouchers, each worth USD 33, to purchase seeds; (ii) vegetable seeds and trainings on good agricultural practices; and (iii) fodder seed. This agricultural assistance restored food autonomy and dignity by preventing families from depending on food assistance for extended periods.

The agriculture sector in **Lebanon** was seriously impacted by the major economic and financial crises in the country. The cost of agricultural inputs rose sharply, leaving farmers unable to afford essential inputs. SFERA AIRC funds enabled FAO to work quickly to address the emergency and boost vegetable production by

providing farmers in Akkar and Baalbeck-Hermel Governorates with vouchers valued at USD 180 to help them access inputs, materials and tools needed for vegetable production in advance of the planting season. The livestock sector faced many challenges in 2020, including the threat of transboundary animal disease, particularly lumpy skin disease (LSD). With outbreaks occurring across the border in the **Syrian Arab Republic**, it was critical to vaccinate cattle against the disease to protect the livelihoods of dairy and beef farmers. With SFERA AIRC funding, FAO swiftly procured LSD vaccine and, working with the Ministry of Agriculture, vaccinated large numbers of cattle against the disease, thereby safeguarding the health and productivity of cattle and the livelihoods of pastoral households.

Mali has endured socio-political and security crises that have caused displacements and alarming rates of food insecurity. In 2020, a resurgence of violent intercommunity conflicts, recurrent climate shocks and the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in losses of life, food availability, arable farmland, pasture and livestock. According to the *Cadre Harmonisé*, 1.3 million people would face acute food insecurity at crisis or worse levels from June to August 2020. With SFERA AIRC funds, FAO rapidly improved the nutrition of vulnerable internally displaced and host community households in Mopti and Timbuktu by providing market gardening kits and rice production kits. This funding also supported pastoral households through the distribution of livestock kits to increase their incomes.

The **Niger** has faced recurrent devastating shocks, including drought, floods and security crises that have caused displacements and reduced agricultural production. Heavy flooding in 2020 affected thousands of people, damaged market gardens, destroyed tonnes of rice production and caused the loss of ruminants. Combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, vulnerable populations were pushed into acute food insecurity. With SFERA AIRC funds, FAO distributed improved cereal and vegetable seeds, animal feed, goats and veterinary health kits. An animal health campaign was also carried out, vaccinating livestock against *peste des petits ruminants*, sheep pox and pasteurellosis, and deworming cattle. In addition, cash transfers were provided to flood-affected households and market gardens were rehabilitated. In Tahoua and Tillabéri, FAO distributed livestock feed and cowpea and millet seed to refugee households. Furthermore, FAO procured vaccines to protect livestock against anthrax (bacterial and symptomatic), sheep pox and pasteurellosis to support the Government in a large-scale vaccination campaign. These interventions strengthened the resilience of farming and pastoral households to better cope with shocks.



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Super Typhoon Goni struck the **Philippines** in November 2020, severely affecting Albay and Cataduanes Provinces, negatively impacting their economies, which were already reeling as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The typhoon damaged 126 000 ha of agricultural land planted with rice, corn, abaca and other high-value crops. It also destroyed boats and fishing gear valued at USD 103 million as well as agricultural equipment and other livelihood resources. To swiftly restore the agriculture-based livelihoods of the most vulnerable, typhoon-affected farmers and fishers in Albay and Cataduanes Provinces, FAO provided multipurpose cash assistance with SFERA AIRC funds.

In 2020 **Somalia** faced its worst desert locust infestation in 25 years. As a result of the damage to crops and rangelands by desert locust as well as from consecutive seasons of flooding in Juba and Shabelle riverine areas, the number of people facing Crisis and Emergency levels of food insecurity was expected to rise by 40 percent to 1.61 million from February to September 2020. SFERA AIRC funds allowed FAO to swiftly deliver rangeland cubes to pastoral households in northern and central Somalia where locusts had depleted pasture. This supplementary feed protected core livestock food sources and reduced the need to migrate in search of pasture.

African migratory locusts were first detected in southern Africa in 2020 in Botswana followed by outbreaks in Angola, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The growing number of hotspots and the spread of the migratory pest threatened irrigated crops, particularly with the main planting season approaching. To immediately control the growing swarms and protect crops, FAO employed SFERA AIRC funds to procure ground control equipment, including sprayers, pesticides and protective gear, and conducted ground surveillance and control operations in targeted areas across the region. Aerial surveillance and control operations were also conducted in Angola.

Food insecurity and malnutrition worsened in the **Sudan** in 2020 as a result of economic crises, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, displacement and climate shocks. Heavy rains led to severe flooding in northern, central and eastern regions of the country, damaging more than 2 million ha of cropland and destroying over 1 million tonnes of staple crops. There were also extensive damages and losses to vegetable production, seeds, tools, and agriculture-related machinery and infrastructure. With SFERA AIRC funds, FAO rapidly distributed vegetable seeds, hand tools and cash transfers to flood-affected households in Blue Nile and Kassala States. FAO also provided trainings on improved plant care practices. These activities improved the productive capacities of both internally displaced and host community households, reduced the severity of the lean season, and enabled households to become more self-reliant.

The ongoing decade-long crisis in the **Syrian Arab Republic** has severely impacted the livelihoods and food security of millions of people and caused the loss of 30 to 40 percent of livestock in the country. In 2020, the livestock sector suffered further as result of high feed prices, inability to access grazing lands, closure of markets and the high cost of transportation due to COVID-19. In May 2020 an increasing number of cattle became infected with LSD, leading to increased mortality and a reduction in animal productivity. Utilizing SFERA AIRC funds, FAO acted swiftly to vaccinate hundreds of thousands of cattle against LSD. Veterinarians were also trained on LSD recognition, prevention and treatment. Moreover, FAO distributed animal feed to small-scale livestock producing households to further strengthen their livelihoods.

In **Viet Nam** in October 2020, over 1.5 million people were impacted by prolonged heavy rains and floods associated with three tropical storms and a typhoon. Widespread flooding and landslides damaged 30 000 ha of agricultural lands, caused the loss of over 2 million livestock and reduced the availability of foodstuffs in local markets, thus inflating prices and reducing families' ability to purchase food. Many families were forced to sell vital productive assets or use their savings to access food. Thanks to SFERA AIRC funds, FAO was able to quickly respond through cash transfers to enable vulnerable smallholders in Quang Binh and Quang Tri Provinces to purchase livestock feed and other critical farming inputs. Alongside these, FAO provided extension and veterinary services. Together, this support has helped restore food security and kickstarted the recovery of livestock production in affected areas.

Anticipatory action window

Anticipatory action is an approach that translates early warnings into activities that reduce the impact of disasters. These activities can consist of different prevention and mitigation measures, which vary depending on the anticipated hazard, the context and sectors at risk. Some key parameters that characterize anticipatory action are:

- **Timing:** anticipatory action interventions should be implemented ahead of a hazard's impact. More specifically, for sudden onset events, anticipatory action interventions should be implemented before the hazard (e.g. prior to a cyclone making landfall), while for slow onset events, these should be implemented before the peak of the impact (e.g. the deterioration of the food security situation).
- **Forecast:** anticipatory action interventions should be triggered by an early warning/forecasting information combined with the analysis of the current situation.
- **Objective:** the action's objective is to protect food security and livelihood assets from the potential impact of hazards on the most vulnerable families and build their resilience to future shocks.

FAO is among the agencies leading global efforts in testing and upscaling anticipatory action approaches to prevent food crises. Curbing the deterioration of food security is crucially linked with protecting livelihoods and people's means to sustain themselves and their food security. FAO's anticipatory action aims to protect agricultural assets and livelihoods from the impact of hazards in order to prevent the adoption of negative coping strategies, which lead to hunger and destitution.

The SFERA anticipatory action window enables country offices to access the kind of pre-allocated financing necessary for the timely implementation of anticipatory action interventions. It releases funds upon accurate early warning signals of an impending disaster, also called triggers. The trigger mechanism combines quantitative thresholds (e.g. based on climate forecasts, food security projections, remote sensing data, etc.) with qualitative information and expert judgement.

Table 10. Anticipatory action window

Country	Allotment USD (000)
Afghanistan	617
Bangladesh	140
Democratic Republic of the Congo	400
Haiti	540
Kenya	300
Mongolia	126
Senegal	300
Syrian Arab Republic	417
Subregional West Africa	500
Sierra Leone	400
Zimbabwe	400
Total allotment	4 140

In 2020, the SFERA anticipatory action window funded interventions in ten countries and one subregion, with a total sum of USD 4.1 million, thanks to the contributions of the Governments of Belgium, Germany and Sweden. The budget allocated to SFERA anticipatory action projects in 2020 were more than tripled compared with 2019. Such increases in allocated resources were due to the expected widespread secondary impacts of COVID-19 on food security, among other reasons. The expansion of SFERA anticipatory action was made possible through a

new strategic partnership between the German Federal Foreign Office and FAO in the framework of a three-year programme aiming at “Scaling-up Early Warning Early Action for agriculture and food security.”

The SFERA anticipatory action projects implemented in 2020 provided key livelihood assistance to more than 25 000 households ahead of a range of forecast shocks, including the anticipated secondary effects of COVID-19, floods, severe winter conditions and locust invasions. Assistance was delivered through input distribution (e.g. animal feed, animal vaccination, crop seeds, agricultural tools and equipment for crop pest surveillance), cash-based transfers, as well as awareness raising and capacity building activities.

Most anticipatory action projects carried out in 2020 aimed at mitigating the secondary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on agricultural livelihoods and food security in high-risk countries. The activation of the SFERA anticipatory action window was based on scenario analyses and crisis timelines, which overlaid information on the likely evolution of the pandemic and related containment measures with information on climate, livelihood activities, seasonal food security fluctuations as well as projections. Together the most likely secondary impacts were mapped and windows of opportunity to implement anticipatory actions were identified.

In **Afghanistan**, from June to September 2020, there was a high likelihood of COVID-19 spreading and essential health-related restrictions were thus urgently implemented. This came at a critical time in the agricultural calendar as the main staple crops are harvested and herders migrate to traditional grazing areas. To protect these livelihoods, cash transfers and livestock protection kits were distributed to ensure that farmers have secure access to healthy and nutritious food as markets became harder to reach, and keep livestock healthy as they are forced to migrate off path.

Bangladesh was at risk of two cumulative shocks: COVID-19 combined with the onset of the monsoon season, which can cause widespread flooding. The timing of these events coincided with the key growing period for the Aman rice season and trade of livestock. At this critical period, agricultural inputs and livestock care packages were distributed to the most vulnerable communities. Cash transfers were also employed to help protect these critical agricultural assets.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, essential health-related COVID-19 movement restrictions enacted within the capital Kinshasa and from the capital to the neighbouring provinces were expected to severely disrupt local food supply chains, affect the availability of and accessibility to food, reduce income-generating opportunities, and ultimately impact households’ food security among urban and peri-urban vulnerable communities. To mitigate these impacts, FAO provided rapid support to local peri-urban food producers to strengthen the availability and accessibility of fresh local food products through vegetable seed distribution. Furthermore, FAO distributed rice processing and conservation machinery in order to anticipate the impacts of the crisis on the rice value chain.

In **Kenya**, FAO provided agropastoral households with unconditional cash and information on safe access to agricultural inputs and services ahead of planting in order to mitigate any potential disruption when essential measures were implemented to contain the spread of COVID-19 at a critical period of planting for the rainy season beginning in October.

In **Senegal**, forward-looking analyses concluded that necessary health-related containment measures could have negative consequences on the production and marketing capacities of small farmers, particularly women involved in small-scale agricultural production and trade, as well as on the availability of food for the most vulnerable households. To reduce these risks, FAO, together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Equipment, United Nations Women and United Nations Population Fund, launched the anticipatory action initiative called “*Le panier de la ménagère*”. The initiative aimed to build a bridge between the producers who could not sell their perishable food products and the peri-urban food-insecure households, with a view to preventing food security deterioration.

In **Sierra Leone**, FAO rapidly sought to boost local food production to counter any disruption of food supply chains linked to the roll out of essential health-related containment measures at the start of the agricultural season. FAO’s anticipatory action project thus focused on distribution of local short-cycle crop seeds and



supporting the marketing of perishable products through training of women's and youth groups on processing and commercialization of produce. The goal was to increase food availability, reduce post-harvest losses, and pre-empt food security deterioration among the most vulnerable farming households.

With a large share of the rural population in Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Phase 3 or worse as a result of severe macro-economic conditions and the impacts of severe climatic events (drought and cyclone), **Zimbabwe** was particularly vulnerable to any further shocks, including the effects of COVID-19. The main expected secondary impacts included the curtailing of formal and informal markets, loss of employment for workers in the agriculture sector, loss of remittances, and further food price inflation. To mitigate these, FAO distributed animal feed to livestock farmers before a lack of access to fodder led to increased animal mortality and the adoption of negative coping strategies. Crop seeds were distributed to facilitate the planting season starting in November 2020 in order to mitigate any disruption of input supply chains.

In the **Syrian Arab Republic**, the economic repercussions of the pandemic were expected to affect food supply and demand through reduced purchasing power and food production capacity. Of particular concern were vulnerable cattle farmers due to difficulties in accessing grazing land during the harsh winter season. Therefore, the anticipatory action intervention focused on distributing silage to the most vulnerable households ahead of winter, in October 2020, to reduce the risk of animal health deteriorating, maintain animal productivity, and pre-empt the adoption of negative coping strategies by small-scale cattle farmers.

In **Haiti**, a context characterized by economic fragility, socio-political tensions and high levels of vulnerability, FAO implemented an anticipatory action project to mitigate any potential negative effects of essential health-related containment measures on the availability and affordability of food and agricultural inputs. In order to



prevent food security deterioration, the project provided vegetable seeds, agricultural tools and cash to nearly 1 000 vulnerable households living in urban or peri-urban areas of the cities of Fort Liberté and Ouanaminthe. These interventions aimed at ensuring that farmers could satisfy immediate food needs while continuing their agricultural production activities despite the challenges posed by necessary COVID-19 containment measures.

In all of the aforementioned projects, FAO and partners conducted activities to raise community awareness of measures to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 along the food chain. Close coordination with governments and partners at all levels was essential to ensure timely implementation despite the multiple constraints.

In January 2020, the Government of **Mongolia** released a *dzud* risk map raising the alarm that over 50 percent of the country was at risk of *dzud* (harsh winter), with livestock being the most at-risk agriculture sector. As past events have demonstrated, the loss of livestock assets can result in household's indebtedness and instigate large migration movements of vulnerable herders into urban areas in search of economic support. Previous anticipatory action projects in Mongolia showed that timely support could mitigate the negative impact of *dzud* on small herders, prevent destitution and strengthen their resilience to future shocks.⁵ Therefore, FAO promptly activated the SFERA anticipatory action fund and delivered animal care kits and unconditional cash grants to 450 herder households in four high-risk provinces. The action was closely coordinated with the Government and the Mongolian Red Cross Society, which assisted an additional 1 000 families. Preliminary results of an impact evaluation demonstrate that these interventions contributed to reducing animal mortality, increasing offspring survival, and reducing indebtedness.

In April 2020, FAO's Desert Locust Information Service forecasts had warned of the risk of a **desert locust invasion** from the Horn of Africa into West Africa, starting from late June/early July 2020. Some swarms could have reached the eastern part of the Sahel in eastern Chad from spring breeding areas in Arabia and East Africa. If desert locust had arrived in the Sudan before the summer rains, the swarms were likely to continue westwards across the Sahel from Chad to Mauritania. An FAO analysis showed that a desert locust invasion in West Africa would have threatened the food security of an additional 9 million people. Therefore, FAO promptly implemented an

⁵ www.fao.org/3/ca2181en/CA2181EN.pdf

anticipatory action project to support desert locust forecasting, surveillance, monitoring and control operations. The project targeted two frontline countries, namely Chad and Niger, where the first swarms were expected to arrive at the beginning of the rainy season (June-July 2020), or at the end of the 2020 agricultural campaign (October 2020). Although the desert locust invasion in West Africa did not materialize, the project had the positive effect of reinforcing capacities, increasing awareness and improving preparedness for desert locust surveillance and control.

Desert locust programme window

Under the SFERA desert locust programme window, USD 44.1 million were received from the Governments of Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Louis Dreyfus Foundation.

Table 11. Funding provided under the desert locust programme window

Country	Amount USD (000)
Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda	10 000
Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda	5 217
Ethiopia	108
Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia	27 348
Kenya and Uganda	1 436
Total allotment	44 109

The desert locust response remains a priority for the entire Organization and affected governments. FAO declared a thematic scale-up for desert locust applying Level 3 protocols in January 2020 and will continue through 30 June 2021. To date desert locust appeals raised over USD 210 million for surveillance and control operations as well as livelihood-safeguarding activities.

FAO was enabled to strengthen and expedite its overall response to the desert locust crisis thanks to funds contributed by the SFERA desert locust programme window. Through FAO's overall response, 2.5 million ha of land have been treated in total since January 2020. With these efforts, it is estimated that over 4 million tonnes of cereal have been protected, which are valued at USD 1.2 billion. This is enough to feed more than 26 million people for one year and protect more than 1.8 million pastoral households from livelihood loss and distress.



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In addition, FAO reached 225 135 households with livelihoods support in the Greater Horn of Africa and Yemen. These inputs were combined with cash (where applicable) to ensure that vulnerable households could meet their immediate needs. Moreover, FAO built local, national and regional capacity. As a result, regions are much better equipped in terms of human capacity and expertise, equipment, as well as operational ground and air surveillance and control teams. This has helped to prevent a major humanitarian crisis in the region and avert a potential massive infestation in West Africa and the Sahel.

COVID-19 window

Under the SFERA COVID-19 window, USD 2.9 million were received from the Government of Belgium. The interventions were implemented in support of the United Nations Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan, which reflected the urgent need to address non-health impacts of COVID-19.

Table 12. Funding provided under the COVID-19 window

Country	Amount (USD 000)
Colombia	500
Democratic Republic of the Congo	467
Iraq	500
Mali	467
Niger	500
Sudan	500
Total allotment	2 934

Cash and voucher assistance, particularly through unconditional cash and cash for work, are supporting livelihood diversification and home-based food production, ensuring further fresh food availability and income. In the **Sudan**, FAO is boosting the purchasing power of people by injecting cash within the most affected communities to enable them to meet their household food needs and to maintain their livelihoods. Fishing kits and vegetable seeds complement the support provided to preserve food production and communities' access to food.

Maintaining and scaling up provision of critical quality inputs (seeds, feed, fertilizers, poultry) is boosting food production, especially through seed distribution, voucher schemes, seed fairs and cash+, in a range of contexts. In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, FAO is acting to strengthen local food production, especially of nutritious products, maintain access to food for households in the peri-urban area of Nsele, stabilize their income and ensure dietary diversity where a vast majority of households consume only one meal per day and struggle to meet their basic needs, relying on average daily income lower than USD 2.

For displaced and host communities, FAO is supporting food production of internally displaced people, refugees 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 **Iraq**, FAO is providing unconditional cash and in-kind assistance to internally displaced people and returnees in Salah Al Din Governorate. The intervention enables households to meet their immediate needs, including food while increasing their ability to boost their agriculture-derived income.

FAO is supporting livestock rearing, recognizing that livestock owners and particularly nomadic pastoralists have been especially hard hit by the pandemic's indirect impacts. Activities include providing animal feed and animal health services. For instance, in the **Niger**, FAO provided animal feed, which was distributed in the form of sales at subsidized prices and to livestock feed banks.

FAO is 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 is a major portion



of FAO's interventions to address the impacts of COVID-19. Such schemes seek to incentivize continued food production among highly vulnerable populations.

FAO is raising local level awareness to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and disseminating key information on virus prevention and response, specific to ongoing agricultural activities/seasons and livestock transhumance. In close collaboration with the different actors of the health sector in **Mali**, FAO is distributing COVID-19 prevention kits to pastoral communities and disseminating messages on COVID-19 in local languages to build community awareness through Dimitra clubs, Farmers Field Schools and Village Savings and Loans Associations.

Conclusions

SFERA provides FAO with a tool for increasing predictability and continuity in its response at country level. Contributing to SFERA renders FAO the means to provide rapid, high-impact emergency assistance to the most vulnerable populations affected by disaster. It enables FAO to be quicker and more flexible in its response and puts the Organization in a position to quickly upscale its operational capacities at times when needs increase rapidly and exponentially after a disaster.

SFERA interventions identify and integrate the different needs and strengths of women and men, boys and girls. Specific attention is given to ensure that SFERA interventions include supporting female-headed households in emergency response, disseminating technologies and practices that prevent and mitigate disaster impact, while reducing women's work burden, promoting women's access to information and training as well as increasing women's access to productive resources and assets. According to the Gender and Age Marker, all SFERA-AIRC projects recently approved address gender equality at least in some dimensions.

In 2020, SFERA was instrumental in enabling FAO to quickly scale up its desert locust response in the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Southwest Asia, which faced the worst desert locust crisis in decades that represented an unprecedented threat to food security and livelihoods, particularly where food security was already fragile. Through timely advances, catalytic revolving allotments, anticipatory actions and the adoption of a programmatic approach, SFERA accelerated FAO's response capacities leading to strengthening local, regional and national capacities to combat the pest, ultimately protecting millions of rural and pastoral households from livelihood loss and distress.

Throughout the reporting year, SFERA was also critical in strengthening FAO's capacity to quickly understand and address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through timely allotments, FAO was enabled to swiftly conduct country impact assessments to inform interventions as well as to design rapid, evidence-based response actions, addressing the significant information gap regarding the impact of COVID-19 on food security, agricultural production and livelihoods of rural populations. Ultimately, FAO's interventions addressed several vulnerability factors to build back better and increase livelihoods' resilience of communities affected not only by COVID-19, but also by other threats to food security and nutrition.

Finally, the significant increase in the SFERA anticipatory action window in 2020 further strengthened FAO's role in leading global efforts in testing and upscaling anticipatory action approaches to prevent food crises. Anticipating the deterioration of food security is critical to protect livelihoods and people's means to sustain themselves and their food security. Anticipatory actions are cost effective, as evidence built over the past years shows that for every USD 1 FAO invested, households had a return ranging from USD 2.5 to 7.1 in avoided losses and added benefits. These empirical studies provide a critical insight into the value for money of acting before an anticipated crisis has become a humanitarian disaster.



Saving livelihoods saves lives

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