



**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**

EMERGING PRACTICE

ZOOM IN

Exploring emerging options to address the impacts of COVID-19 along the food supply chain

## Protecting agricultural workers through remote COVID-19 awareness campaigns in Pakistan

Using digital media and distanced messaging to promote virus mitigation and combat misinformation

### Context

In Pakistan, 60 percent of the population relies on agricultural livelihoods and resides outside of urban centers. 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.

Even prior to the spread of COVID-19, a fifth of the population – 40 million people – remained food insecure. According to the 2020 Global Report Against 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 (IPC), Crisis and Emergency. Rural poverty rates in these two provinces hover at close to 50 percent.

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 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 has created an added difficulty in communicating remotely with many of Pakistan's hardest-to-reach farming communities.

### Key facts



#### Target group

The intervention targets smallholder farmers and vulnerable households in Pakistan, primarily among remote agricultural populations.



#### Partnerships

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) partners with the Government of Pakistan, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund, International Labor Organization (ILO), other United Nations (UN) agencies and implementing partners.



#### The COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Appeal

The intervention addresses component IV of FAO's emergency response, ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission.

## Impacts of COVID-19 and re-programming

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.

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 labor migration patterns.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Pakistan, together with partners, delivered both physical and remote sensitization messages: field-based resources—including close to 80 000 materials printed and distributed by over 300 000 frontline workers—were complemented with remote communication technologies, ranging from social media posts, local radio broadcasts, and newly modified online components to the farmer field school (FFS) platform.



There is no evidence that **food transmits the coronavirus**, so do not deny nutrition to yourself or your families. Help yourself to fresh or well-packaged processed foods.

**Maintain a healthy diet for you and your family.**

**In stressful times this is important to**

**KEEP YOU HEALTHY.**



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FAO-produced messages, designed to raise awareness and fight misinformation around COVID-19, are translated into multiple languages and shared on digital platforms.

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## Multi-risk challenges

Pakistan is prone to multiple natural hazards, including floods, droughts, earthquakes, landslides, heavy precipitation, avalanches and cyclones. In January 2020, unprecedented snowfall and rain combined with avalanches and flash floods created major livelihood disruptions in many districts within Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, less than several months before lockdown measures began. This came after in 2018 and 2019 most of the same areas suffered from a severe drought.

Pakistan is also an important frontline country for desert locust invasions because it lies on the migratory route of locust swarms, which have engulfed Pakistan, Iran and India, as well as the Horn of Africa and Red Sea area. The eastern provinces of Sindh and Punjab serve as summer breeding grounds, and the southwestern province of Balochistan as the spring and winter breeding area.

The current desert locust invasion has been deemed the worst in 25 years by the FAO Desert Locust Information Service and represents an unprecedented threat to food security and the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.



*“FAO team conducted awareness sessions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. We learned important precautions to protect ourselves from the infection such as not touching our face or mouth, the need to cover our mouth while coughing, maintaining 6-foot distance from each other and keeping our children at home to keep them safe.”*

**Sakina, Amal Kot, Kurram,  
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

## Methodological approach

FAO's COVID-19 response options in Pakistan are focusing on **targeted, preventative health messaging within an initial 8-12-week timeframe and across a range of both digital media and broadcast platforms**. These are being supplemented by **physically distanced field-based trainings**, all designed with accessing hard-to-reach rural communities in mind, 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 (IEC) materials (e.g. **posters and brochures**), **translated into local languages and displayed in supermarkets, local food shops, and other public places**. Health and physical distancing guidelines are also being shared remotely **via radio broadcast, WhatsApp, and FAO Pakistan social media channels**, including Urdu messages and infographics developed by FAO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.
- 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 **animations dubbed into local languages** that will emphasize COVID-19 mitigation practices, including handwashing and physical distancing. These will be shared via social media and WhatsApp, as well as via television broadcast slots.
- **Online awareness sessions conducted by FAO field staff** now working from home, as well as the harnessing of FAO's farmer field school (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. Methodological approach





Along with hygiene and sanitation messages, instructional posters highlight the enhanced vulnerability of food workers.

## Replicability and upscaling

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 have risen exponentially in Pakistan, affecting many rural populations within FAO intervention areas. As businesses begin to reopen, there is 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.

Interventions initially piloted within a single intervention district have since been **replicated** and are now operational throughout every province in Pakistan, as well as carried out by partner agencies. The intervention, designed with illiterate rural populations in mind, can be replicated in areas with similar demographics and in communities facing similar challenges.

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.

**Additional programming for radio is currently being planned**, including 18 radio programmes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over a nine-week interval. Five further radio spots, along with public service announcements (PSAs) translated into local languages and recorded for television broadcast, will play over the coming weeks in each of Pakistan's five provinces and be shared by FAO's digital channels. In addition to the 80 000 posters already distributed throughout public spaces, 11 000 new copies of the IEC posters will be disseminated within the remotest districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

As the harvest season nears, the **intervention is also currently being upscaled to include standard operating procedure (SOP) infographics**, translated into local languages and made using easy-to-understand visuals, that will be linked to food safety and safe harvesting. These will be shared through digital media platforms and on WhatsApp. Further interventions will also target youth, small business owners and women for information dissemination on COVID-19 safe practices.

As interventions scale up, an additional 11 000 printed posters are being developed and distributed throughout remote districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



In remote parts of Colombia, Haiti, Kenya and South Sudan, where affected populations do not typically have internet connectivity or, many times, access to mobile phones, radio programs have been harnessed to disseminate crucial information on managing and mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic. In areas where communities have smartphone access, social media platforms have been used to communicate training and sensitization messages. In each case, country offices built upon existing remote platforms to convey key messaging.

### In Colombia:

- Radio programs have reached 250 000 listeners throughout the country's rural areas.
- WhatsApp campaigns with tailored technical messaging ("Information Kits") have reached 5 000 farmers linked to FAO projects.
- A Twitter campaign, #ElCampoSigue ("Farming doesn't stop") launched with a potential reach of 4 million people. Web forums and webinars reached an additional audience of 83 944 people.

### In Haiti:

- Original programming, disseminated via rural radio channels, is part of a social mobilization campaign aimed at preventing the spread of the virus and abuse toward contaminated patients.
- Targeting rural populations, two ongoing series will be produced: one featuring roundtable debates and discussions with featured experts, the other reported pieces, drawing on first-hand experiences, ranging from COVID-19 prevention strategies to the path to recovery.

### In Kenya:

- Support through a SFERA fund is being provided to pastoralist and agro-pastoralists within four rural counties.
- Tailored messages are being developed to raise awareness around COVID-19 and food safety, as well as easy-to-understand health guidelines.
- They are being recorded in local languages and disseminated via radio broadcast.

### In South Sudan:

- FAO is working to ensure uninterrupted agricultural production through a message-based awareness campaign, designed to be able to reach remote pastoralist communities.
- Messages on both farming practices and COVID-19 mitigation strategies will be disseminated via phone and radio, including solar-powered radio for off-grid access.
- IEC material (posters, banners, leaflets, etc.) will also be translated locally and distributed.
- Additionally, the Pastoralist Livelihood Education Field School (PLEFS), a field-based learning curriculum for nomadic herders, is being upscaled to include information on COVID-19.

## Key learning

Since the beginning of the campaign, extensive research within communities has been conducted regularly to ensure that the interventions being carried out are in line with evolving issues and that the messaging has been tailored to be effective in curbing the spread of the virus.

### **Adapt to evolving needs with tailored, up-to-date messaging**

With this in mind, and since the priority issues that have been identified in both rural areas are constantly in flux, it is **recommended to closely monitor changing needs and behaviors within each province and to adapt each message accordingly** for maximum effectiveness.



*“FAO advised us on measures we need to take to protect ourselves against COVID-19. Now when I leave the house, I use a face mask. When I return, I wash my hands first before doing anything else. I also cover my mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.”*  
**Handri, Dharsi Bagat village, Abdulabad, Sindh province**



*“During the COVID-19 pandemic, I am closely coordinating with farmers (active members of farmer field schools) and government department officials (line departments). As a facilitator it is my duty to facilitate the farmers – I regularly conduct telephonic sessions with them on wheat and other crop harvesting procedures, threshing, storing techniques and marketing during the current COVID 19 situation. I also sensitize the farmers about some important safety protocols and the measures that they need to take while working in the fields.”*  
**Ibrar Hussain Abbasi, District Ghotki**

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