



Economic inclusion and social protection to reduce poverty Rural social protection in Africa

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The issue

COVID-19 poses significant challenges to already strained rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of food-insecure and poor people live. The pandemic is exacerbating long-term, complex crises in the region arising from economic downturn, conflict and extreme weather events. Prior to COVID-19, Africa was already the continent most affected by food crises, accounting for 54 percent of all people in food crisis globally. More than half of the world's 135 million people experiencing severe or acute food insecurity are in Africa – and this is expected to increase as the effects of COVID-19 compound the continent's protracted problems. Even before the pandemic hit, Africa was feeling the economic effects of the global recession prompted by the sharp decline in demand and production from those regions first affected by the virus (China, the European Union and the United States of America). Measures to slow the spread of the virus in sub-Saharan Africa, such as social distancing, school closures, the prohibition of gatherings, the closure of non-essential businesses and the halting of non-essential economic activities, have had devastating consequences.

These impacts are worsening already rising rates of hunger, malnutrition and poverty in precarious situations across the region. The March 2020 Cadre Harmonisé depicts an alarming situation in West Africa, the Sahel and Cameroon. In the period from March to May 2020, for example, an estimated 14 million people in the region were estimated to be severely food insecure. Projections for the lean season, from June to August 2020, suggest an unprecedented 19 million people at risk of severe food insecurity, largely due to drought (Senegal) and increased conflict and displacement in the Sahel (particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali), generating significant refugee populations. The fall army worm and desert locust may further impact West and East African farmers in 2020–2021; locust swarms have already had significant effects on farmers and food security in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. COVID-19-related containment measures have disrupted traditional transhumance patterns, which may lead to further tensions and local displacement. Weather extremes, such as flooding and drought in Rwanda and Zambia, have led to production shortfalls, and Rwanda is contending with growing numbers of displaced people from surrounding countries.

Limited basic social services and a lack of essential risk-management mechanisms, such as social protection, are adding to the risk of infection in rural areas and compromising people's well-being, socioeconomic activities and livelihoods. Vulnerable groups, such as children, women, youths and indigenous peoples, face additional challenges. Moreover, the rural economy in sub-Saharan Africa is predominantly informal, employing up to 80-90 percent of workers, exposing them to income volatility and the risk of severe food insecurity, worsening diet and poor enforcement of health-and-safety norms. Putting in place new social-protection measures and expanding and adapting existing ones will be key to containing

Budget

USD 25 million

Time frame

2021–2024

SDGs



Related FAO policy notes on COVID-19

- ▶ [Social Protection and COVID-19 response in rural areas](#)
- ▶ [Social ensuring effective response and inclusive recovery in the context of COVID-19 in Africa](#)



the spread of COVID-19, to protecting livelihoods during the response and to empowering and strengthening the capacity of rural communities for longer-term recovery.

The action

The programme will support inclusive recovery in the short and medium term, while strengthening long-term resilience to multiple shocks and any potential resurgence of the pandemic. It will:

- 1 Address potential disruption to existing social-protection programmes in rural areas due to movement restrictions or closures.
- 2 Enhance immediate COVID-19 responses in rural areas, by designing new structures or expanding and adapting existing social-protection and/or cash-based interventions.
- 3 Support evidence-based advocacy to ensure that budget allocations are prioritized to maintain support for social-protection systems and their expansion to rural areas, to protect them in periods of fiscal contraction and ensure inclusive economic recovery strategies.
- 4 Provide technical assistance to facilitate wider coverage or forms of assistance, ensuring the protection of vulnerable households that are currently not eligible for social assistance programmes, but are now considered vulnerable groups due to COVID-19.
- 5 Strengthen the risk and shock responsiveness of existing systems, supporting the creation of contingency funds and enhancing ties with early-warning, conflict-sensitive and humanitarian programming and climate adaptation.
- 6 Support continued access to healthy diets and the prevention of all forms of malnutrition by scaling up nutrition-sensitive social protection, including homegrown school feeding.
- 7 Support the capacity of social-protection participants to enhance their economic potential and boost the resilience of rural households to the multiple threats posed by COVID-19 and climate change.
- 8 Strengthen linkages with economic inclusion processes at territorial level, including productive interventions, natural resource management, climate-smart technologies, rural finance options (such as credit and insurance) and advisory services.
- 9 Generate solid evidence on the short- and medium-term impacts of expected action and inclusive recovery via social protection.

- 10 Foster the exchange of best practices through South-South and Triangular Cooperation to support countries in identifying solutions to address the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19.

Expected results

- 1 Vulnerable and poor households in rural areas will be effectively supported through social-protection schemes during and after the pandemic.
- 2 Innovative, inclusive approaches will be in place to effectively reach and cover informal workers with social protection, also by coordinating with social groups, rural producer and workers' associations, farmer registries, fisheries and forestry, and climate-related information systems.
- 3 Rural social-protection systems will be strengthened to effectively integrate risk-informed and shock-responsive components and linkages with early-warning, conflict-sensitive programming and climate adaptation measures.
- 4 The economic potential and resilience of rural households will be strengthened by linkages with economic inclusion processes at territorial level.
- 5 Evidence will be generated and disseminated on the impact of social protection in managing risk, promoting economic inclusion and natural resource management, supporting nutrition and healthy diets and building resilient livelihoods, also in the context of climate change and conflict.
- 6 Stakeholder knowledge and capacity will be enhanced on the role and intervention pathways of social protection in managing crises in rural areas, and building back better, including through South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

Partnerships

The United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme, the International Labour Organization, the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, le Comité Permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel, the Centre for International Environmental Law and civil-society organizations.



Programme links

The programme will build on the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Rural Social Protection programme, as well as interventions supported by the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Fund and projects to address economic inclusion, nutrition and climate adaptation. The programme will have synergies with other FAO COVID-19 response programmes, in particular, programmes to support young informal rural workers and smallholder family farmers, to promote gender equality and rural women's economic empowerment and to prevent child labour. It is aligned with the work of the Global Network Against Food Crises, FAO's COVID-19 Humanitarian Appeal and FAO's contribution to the Social Protection Inter-Agency Board, as well as the Grand Bargain Cash and Social Protection Group and the Hand-in-Hand initiative.

Country focus

Africa: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, Zambia

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