



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Social Protection to mitigate and recover from COVID-19 in rural areas: an introduction

**E-coaching on Social Protection:
Towards Responsive Systems
March 2021**

Why focus on rural areas?

- Estimates for 2017, suggest that **~689 million** people live in **extreme poverty**. WB estimates that **COVID-19 has pushed an additional 88-115 million people** into extreme poverty in 2020
- Of these, **~80 percent live in rural areas**. Poverty and vulnerability are concentrated among **smallholder farmers, casual farm laborers, landless laborers/post farmgate workers, pastoralists, small-scale fisherfolk and foresters, and rural migrants**
- After steadily declining for decades, **chronic hunger increased in 2014 and continues to rise**. Number of undernourished people globally could **increase by 83-132 million in 2020**.
- **World food prices rose for an eighth consecutive month in Jan 2021**, hitting their highest level since July 2014
- **>3 billion people** cannot afford a healthy diet.

COVID-19 has accentuated rural vulnerabilities

Low access to public services

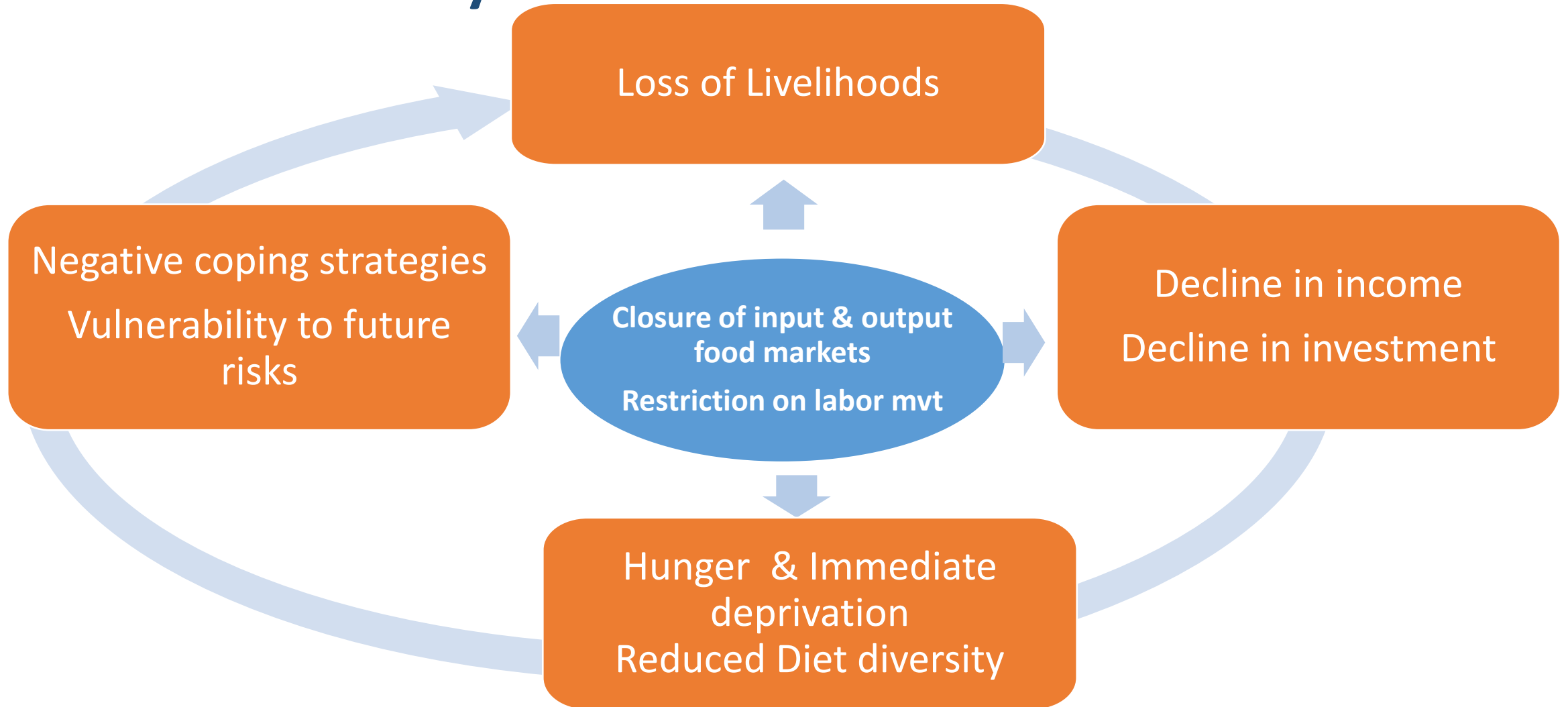
High proportion of informal jobs & self-employment

Heavy dependence on movement for livelihoods

Burden-of-care disproportionately borne by women

- Less likely to have formal ID documents and/or access to public offices to issue these
- when rural populations were already operating under severe constraints
 - Low human capital
 - Basic technologies
 - Limited modern inputs
 - Limited livestock
 - ...
- Covid-19 contracted supply and increased demand for services
- Downward agricultural wages
- Limited access to land
- No access to credit and insurance
- Social exclusion
- Climate-related risks
- ...
- ...
- Most rural community health workers are women
- Out-of-school children and the sick
- Reduction in reproductive & health services

This reinforces the vicious circle of poverty & food insecurity



Social Protection is playing a key role for immediate relief and for “Building Back Better”

Protective

Preventive

Promotive

Transformative

Social Protection

- Relief from immediate deprivation and food insecurity
- Prevent negative coping strategies & persistent poverty
- Strengthen rural livelihoods
- Reduce barriers to access services (social, productive, financial, etc)
- Inclusive growth by enhancing economic capacity of even the poorest
- Empower excluded groups

Agriculture/ Forestry/ Fisheries/ Livestock/ Environment

- Keep rural economy & food value chain moving
- Ensure continuity of seasonal farm operations
- Facilitate adapted marketing channels and links to end-consumers
- Extension services
- Vocational training
- Agri-business services
- Build resilient, sustainable, inclusive food systems

Adapting to the pandemic crisis has taken many forms

Expansion of SP coverage

- Expanding eligibility criteria
- Leveraging existing registration systems from within and outside the SP sector
- Challenges: Low ID coverage (high informality), lack of adequate MIS

Adequacy & timeliness of payments & services

- Frontloading and increasing the size of payments
- Adopting digital payments - challenge: rural areas have lower connectivity, fewer cellphone accounts
- Removal of conditionalities that require work or access to school & health services

Collaboration with other departments & organizations

- Pairing SP with support to smallholders/FPOs in accessing input and output markets
- Building capacity for shock responsive SP
- Challenges: Weak coordination mechanisms between stakeholders, lack of harmonization