



COUNCIL

Hundred and Seventieth Session

13-17 June 2022

Update on FAO's Response to COVID-19: Building to transform

Executive summary

More than two years after the start of a global pandemic its negative impacts on health, economy and social systems are evolving and likely to endure over the coming years. While there is hope in some parts of the world for lighter restrictions, the pandemic is still persistent and causing disruption in many others, with ongoing impact mainly on the poor and the most vulnerable.

Vulnerable populations, marginalized, informal and migrant workers as well as women and children are still facing multifaceted impact of this crisis. At the same time the pandemic has provided many lessons for agrifood systems and food security, with extreme impact on the disadvantaged groups, causing huge gender gap and declining coverage of essential nutrition services by around 40 percent around the world. Income loss and supply chain disruption not only increased inequality and poverty but also increased global malnutrition, with many household being obliged to switch to cheaper and less nutritious food.

In the world today many developing countries are facing multiple overlapping crises in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the war in Ukraine with rising food, fuel and fertilizer prices, rising inflation, economic downturn and climate change are causing a greater increase in hunger, poverty and inequality.

FAO has been intensively working on the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme since the start of the pandemic and has extended this comprehensive programme to July 2023. The financial and technical support mobilized through this programme aimed to reach a large share of rural population and relaunch economic activities.

Suggested action by the Council

The Council is invited to take note of the progress made and to provide guidance, as deemed appropriate.

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I. Background

Assessment of Food Security and Nutrition

1. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2021, estimated that between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020 - as many as 161 million more than in 2019, under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic ravaged health, livelihoods and economies across the world throughout 2020 and continued to hold its grip into 2021. It has impacted food security through a multitude of pathways that are still unfolding and that probably will take years to fully understand – pathways that can differ greatly from one country to another and even between regions and sociodemographic groups within countries. A recent study on the impact of COVID-19 on twelve countries across Africa, Latin America and Southern Asia¹ has shown that, on average, three-quarters of the people who suffered from food insecurity attributed their experiences mainly to COVID-19.

2. The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected economies worldwide, with millions of people losing their jobs and income, and pushed into poverty and hunger. The COVID-19 pandemic has also increased the gender gap. Food insecurity has grown by 10 percent more among women than men – an issue that needs close attention and action. Essential nutrition services coverage declined by 40 percent, and nearly half of the countries reported a drop of 50 percent or more for at least one nutrition intervention. Nutrition programmes in schools were the most affected.

3. While the global agrifood systems remained resilient during this crisis, income losses and food price spikes caused inequality to rise. Countries' income per capita has shrunk, creating a cumulative loss to the global economy of more than USD 12 trillion over two years (2020-21), and setting back progress on reducing poverty.

4. Historic emergency fiscal stimuli and debt relief measures have made it possible for countries to spend more than USD 16 trillion to keep their economies functioning. Per capita incomes contracted in more countries than at any time in the recent past, leading to exacerbated inequalities especially in rural areas, especially on the middle class, because of income loss, food prices and pandemic containment measures.

5. In the first quarter of 2022, another crisis looms that is likely to impact the trajectory of food security globally, the war in Ukraine. The unfolding crisis adds additional uncertainty to an already complex picture. The disruptions to agricultural exports produced by the conflict expose global food markets to heightened risks of tighter availabilities, unmet import demand and higher international food prices. All this is likely to add to the count of hungry people. FAO simulations² suggest that under the moderate shock scenario, the global number of undernourished people would increase by 7.6 million people, while this rise would amount to 13.1 million people above baseline estimates under the more severe shock setting. This number could even increase to 18,8 million in 2023 if the same extreme scenario persists and because of the reduced access to fertilizers given the current export restrictions and high prices led to no supply response from key exporting countries in the world.

6. The Russian Federation and Ukraine are net exporters of agricultural products, and they both play leading roles in supplying global markets in foodstuffs, for which exportable supplies are often concentrated in a handful of countries, exposing these markets to increased vulnerability to shocks and volatility. The Russian Federation stands out as the top global wheat exporter, shipping in 2021 a total of 32.9 million tonnes of wheat and meslin (in product weight), or the equivalent of 18 percent of

¹ Boero, V., Cafiero, C., Gheri, F., Kepple, A.W., Rosero Moncayo, J. & Viviani, S. 2021. Access to food in 2020. Results of twenty national surveys using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES). Rome. FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb5623en>

² FAO Information Note. The importance of Ukraine and the Russia Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the current conflict. Rome, 25 March 2022 Update. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9236en/cb9236en.pdf>

global shipments. Ukraine stood as the sixth largest wheat exporter in 2021, exporting 20 million tonnes of wheat and meslin, representing a 10 percent global market share³.

7. The 2022 Global Report on Food Crises estimated that 193 million people in 53 countries/territories experienced acute food insecurity at crisis or worse levels (IPC/CH Phase 3-5) in 2021. This represents an increase of nearly 40 million people compared with the already record numbers of 2020. Of these, over half a million people (570 000) in Ethiopia, southern Madagascar, South Sudan and Yemen were classified in the most severe phase of acute food insecurity Catastrophe (IPC/CH Phase 5) and required urgent action to avert a widespread collapse of livelihoods, starvation and death. When looking at the same 39 countries or territories featured in all editions of the report, the number of people facing crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) nearly doubled between 2016 and 2021, with unabated rises each year since 2018.

8. While it is difficult to disentangle the precise effects of COVID-19 from those of other stressors, the report's food security analysis shows that the pandemic has had a compounding effect on these pre-existing and ongoing drivers of food crisis mainly through declining economic activity related to COVID-19 restrictive measures, leading to income losses and reduced household purchasing power.

9. Post COVID-19 recovery efforts have been affected by the war in Ukraine, which is having various repercussions across the world. According to the recent World Economic Outlook⁴ by the International Monetary fund (IMF), global economic growth is projected to slow from an estimated 6.1 percent in 2021 to 3.6 percent in 2022 and 2023. This represents 0.8 and 0.2 percentage points lower for 2022 and 2023, respectively, than projected in January 2022. The IMF expects a severe double-digit drop in gross domestic product (GDP) for Ukraine and a large contraction in the Russian Federation, along with worldwide spillovers through commodity markets, trade and financial channels.

II. The FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme

10. The FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery is coordinated through an "Umbrella Programme" with a strong focus on seven priority areas of work designed and launched at the beginning of the pandemic. The Programme provides an overall result-based monitoring and reporting, while coordinating the requested technical and policy assistance support across the organization. Through this Programme, FAO has adopted a comprehensive and holistic approach to proactively address the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic in addition to emergency and the humanitarian response, providing concrete, demand-driven support to national governments.

11. The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme enabled partners to leverage the Organization's convening power, real-time data, early warning systems and technical expertise to direct support where and when it is needed most.

12. With operational requirements totaling USD 1.32 billion, this Programme has, as of February 2022, received confirmed and pledged contributions totalling USD 466 million, or approximately 35 percent of the target. The Programme was officially launched in July 2020 and currently extended to July 2023.

13. Following the evolution of the pandemic, the share of development-oriented approved voluntary contributions has shifted from an initial 9 percent to the current level of 32 percent of the overall approved contributions. This suggests that the COVID-19 contributions under FAO's programme are gradually evolving from an Emergency to a Development-based approach. FAO's

³ Issues related to the War in Ukraine and the impact on Market, Food Security and Nutrition are addressed under a specific document for the Council.

⁴ <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2022/04/19/world-economic-outlook-april-2022>

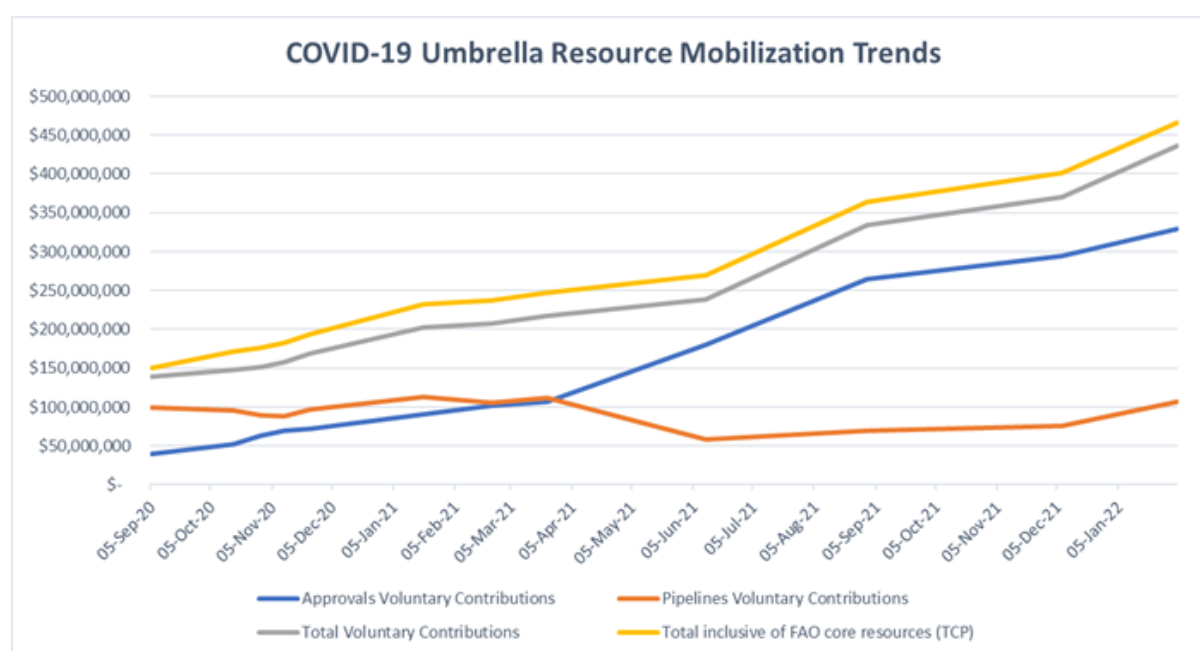
COVID-19 Response is thus currently advancing towards the recovery landscape with a focus on medium and long-term interventions.

14. Four out of the overall six Priority Areas are on track with meeting their own pre-established targets, with the Priority Area dealing with Agrifood Systems Transformation having reached almost 30 percent of its own expected budget, followed by the Global Humanitarian Response, Economic Inclusion and Social Protection, and Smallholder Resilience. The low relative funding for Areas dealing with Trade and Food Safety Standards, and Preventing the Next Zoonotic Pandemic (respectively at 8 percent and 5 percent) would require consultation with Members to identify the reasons considering the importance of the topics in this context of the crisis.

15. The World Bank currently represents the main contributor (total of USD 155 million invested), followed by the European Union, Canada, UNOCHA and the United States. Other Resource Partners, such as Japan, Sweden, Belgium and Saudi Arabia, have also significantly supported the initiative across the Organization.

16. In terms of regional focus, the African Region has so far received the largest (and increasing) amount of voluntary contributions and FAO's resources – 38 percent of the total – followed by Near East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean Region, respectively currently standing at 30 and 13 percent.

17. Five percent of the overall resources were allocated to projects with global reach. On the other hand, the share of funding allocated to Asia and the Pacific Region (11 percent) and Europe and Central Asia (3 percent) has been decreasing and therefore suggests a need to further balance regional focus.



18. The highlights of the main activities by each of the seven areas of work are presented as follows:

a. *The Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP): Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and safeguarding livelihoods in food-crisis contexts*

19. Responding to COVID-19 in contexts of food crises requires understanding the multiple interconnected and pre-existing risks and vulnerabilities in each specific context and the multiple entry points to avoid “one-size-fits-all” solutions. After the integration of FAO's global humanitarian response into ongoing Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP), activities to address food crises have been coupled with measures to reduce COVID-19 transmission along the agrifood systems in coordination with other main stakeholders.

20. One major achievement has been the improved measuring and understanding of multiple risks and the real-time assessment and monitoring of the impacts of COVID-19 in 26 food crisis countries, through FAO's new Data-in-Emergencies Hub⁵ launched in 2021, which supports up-to-date (i) risk profiling; (ii) monitoring of the impact of shocks on agricultural livelihoods; including through the use of technology for remote assessment in the most food-insecure countries in the world to provide a picture of food insecurity in fragile environments; and (iii) supports ex-post impact assessment to provide a granular understanding of the impact of sudden-onset natural disasters and conflicts on agriculture and agricultural livelihoods.

21. Understanding the impact of COVID-19 is still critical to inform and adapt emergency responses. Countries in which a dedicated assessment has been conducted include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Venezuela, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

22. Putting people at the centre, FAO redesigned its programmes to address both direct and secondary effects of the virus through ensuring the most vulnerable are able to access food, supporting agrifood livelihoods to continue to produce food and to ensure continuity of markets while reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to food chain actors.

23. Given the impacts of COVID-19 on paid labour, purchasing power and agricultural activities, ensuring availability of and stabilizing access to food for the most acutely food-insecure populations has been the top priority for FAO since the onset of the crisis. To deliver critical humanitarian assistance to most vulnerable groups, FAO action was adapted to integrate COVID-19 risk mitigation measures and to reach out to groups most affected by restrictions of movements, increase of prices of food and agriculture inputs and closure of local markets (such as pastoral groups, displaced populations and female headed households).

24. In Colombia, FAO supported the rapid rehabilitation of agricultural livelihoods of the migrant population and returnees from Venezuela, as well as of the host communities, to reduce the impact on their food security and nutrition in urban and peri-urban areas in Colombia after the impact of the measures implemented to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 left many of them without income; forcing them to resort to negative coping strategies, such as reducing food consumption from 3 to 1 meals a day, and to use savings.

25. In Syria, a project was implemented to mitigate the social and economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic, specifically targeting smallholding poultry and dairy farmers who were severely affected by the drastic increase of feed price. FAO contributed to reduce the likeliness of small-scale poultry and dairy cow producers to abandon the production due to the increasing prices of inputs, which would have negatively affected the nutritional status of household members in the short term and the unavailability of animal source foods in the markets in the longer term.

26. Ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations and mitigating the risk of COVID-19 transmission along the food supply chain in food crisis context was also a key priority for FAO. Key efforts have been deployed by FAO with partners and all actors along the food supply chain to ensure that they follow appropriate measures to reduce exposure and prevent COVID-19 transmission. FAO has intervened continuously to raise the local level of awareness to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and to disseminate key information on virus prevention and response, specific to ongoing agricultural activities/seasons and livestock transhumance. In Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Colombia, Haiti, Iraq, Malawi, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, only to name some countries where FAO developed communication materials in local languages and deployed a series of radio broadcasts to reach agriculture producers in remote areas, in combination with promoting sustainable agricultural practices, to boost community awareness on the

⁵ <https://data-in-emergencies.fao.org/>

risks of COVID-19 transmission and prevention measures. More than 11 million rural people have been reached by awareness raising campaigns to reduce the transmission along the value chain.

b. Data for Decision-making: Ensuring quality data and analysis for effective policy support to food-systems and Zero Hunger

27. FAO has continued its effort of implementing food security assessments, rapid data collections in 20 countries⁶ based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) and a report was published in July 2021⁷. In addition, at least 30 countries and institutions were supported in the collection and analysis of food insecurity data to monitor the impact of COVID-19. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (July 2021) presented most up-to-date information on food security and nutrition at global level and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, FIES data was collected in twenty Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) between November 2021 and January 2022, with the objective of assessing food insecurity at national and subnational levels. The report will be published in July 2022.

28. Regarding innovative data sources, FAO's Data Lab launched a Big Data Tool in mid-April 2020. This is an automated interactive platform that publishes real-time information updated on a daily basis. The Tool scrapes daily food prices, tweets and news with a view to analyze the COVID-19 impact on agrifood value chains. All data is accessible and searchable with a semantic search engine. The food prices analytics were overhauled in 2021 using the daily prices to now cast consumer price indices and highlight recent events of increased volatility on a global scale. To understand the implications of COVID-19 on food insecurity, the Data Lab is currently developing an interactive dashboard that collects news articles related to food security from more than 500 media outlets around the world, providing real-time visualizations of the topic and its evolution over time. Moreover, a new set of indicators is being developed on volatility in the banking sector, to connect the COVID-19 impact to the financial dimension. The FAO Data Lab also developed a new approach to update poverty data through satellite imagery and statistical analysis of available socio-economic data. The method was piloted in Yemen also supported by the Hand-in-Hand Initiative.

29. Regarding adapting agricultural data collection methods, most activities envisaged under the AGRISurvey Project and the 50x2030 Initiative are implemented as planned in Armenia, Cambodia, Georgia, Nepal, Senegal and Uganda. Specific COVID-19 impact related sections were included in questionnaires of the Cambodia Annual Surveys of 2020 and 2021, and the Uganda Agricultural Survey of 2019-2020. Data from Uganda shows that the impact of COVID-19 in the period June-September 2020 were mixed: some farmers faced challenges in accessing inputs, and decided to reduce planting; while others seemed to have easy access to inputs, thanks to easier access to credit. Rather, product commercialization was an issue, with some farmers selling less or at lower than expected prices.

30. Policy support for post COVID-19 recovery offered three outputs: (i) a ranking of agricultural sectors where investment would have the highest payoffs for economic growth with rural poverty reduction; (ii) maps for specific sectors selected from the top of the ranking, which help identify territories (i.e. districts, provinces, etc.) of highest productive and poverty-reduction potential for investments; and (iii) concrete investment roadmaps for those selected sectors and territories. Output (i) was delivered to the Governments of Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Uganda. Output (ii) was delivered to the Governments of Nicaragua and Uganda and is being prepared for Mexico and Paraguay. Output (iii) is being piloted in Uganda. In addition, FAO developed a monthly nominal rate of protection (NRP) indicator, which helps assessing in quasi-real-time the incentive or

⁶ Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Zimbabwe.

⁷ Boero, V., Cafiero, C., Gheri, F., Kepple, A.W., Rosero Moncayo, J. & Viviani, S. 2021. Access to food in 2020. Results of twenty national surveys using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES). Rome. FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb5623en>

disincentive that policy measures adopted during the pandemic may have generated along agrifood value chains.

c. Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty: Pro-poor COVID-19 responses for an inclusive post-pandemic economic recovery

31. FAO provided policy support assistance and awareness raising on the impact of COVID-19 on migrants, with particular attention to seasonal and agricultural migrant workers and return migrants. In Senegal, Nepal, Moldova and Uganda, FAO supported the reintegration of return migrants in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, by piloting orientation and support services, delivering agri-business training and livelihoods support and mobilizing the contribution of diaspora for COVID-19 recovery. An e-learning course on migrants working in agrifood systems and a toolkit for the sustainable reintegration of return migrants in rural areas were developed.

32. FAO partnered with International Development and Research Associates to build evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on rural livelihoods in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Fiji, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Supporting the recovery from COVID-19, in Timor-Leste, FAO linked farmers to output markets through a school feeding programme; in Zambia it supported the expansion of social protection by further developing the Integrated Social Protection Information System, and in the Philippines, it tested the capacity of the social protection system in the context of a pandemic. FAO promoted the institutionalization of the anticipatory approach into national social protection systems. The organization supported the governments of Bangladesh, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan, Philippines, Viet Nam, Nicaragua, Colombia and Dominican Republic to strengthen social protection policies, programmes and operational tools channeling social assistance in anticipation of forecasted shocks.

33. In Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, Guatemala and Uganda, FAO continued to support youth organizations and agribusinesses' growth, access to finance and resilience for an inclusive and post-pandemic economic recovery. Regional and national platforms were promoted to facilitate timely access of youth to information and training in case of new outbreaks. In 2021, in Uganda, FAO supported the Ministries of Labour and Agriculture to develop Standard Operating Procedures for Prevention and Control of COVID-19 in the Agricultural Sector.

34. In Niger, the Dimitra Clubs were integrated in three projects enhancing community resilience against COVID-19 while strengthening women's leadership. In Cambodia, FAO continued mitigating gendered impacts of the pandemic while accelerating the recovery of rural livelihoods, targeting women and girls through Dimitra Clubs and Women Empowerment - Farm Business Schools. FAO Knowledge Sharing Platform on Resilience produced an animated film on leveraging the power of community groups and illustrating the experience of Dimitra Clubs in the fight against COVID-19.

35. FAO continued supporting cotton growing households in Burkina Faso, Mali and Pakistan to mitigate use of child labour as a coping mechanism, and further integrated prevention of child labour during crises, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, in training curricula of Farmer Field Schools and Dimitra Clubs. As part of FAO-World Bank Cooperation Programme, FAO provided support to the Land Administration Authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Philippines, Serbia and Vietnam to assess the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their service delivery and to adjust the support to the new demands. New COVID-19 related e-services were implemented, based on the existing Geospatial platforms.

36. FAO assisted Fiji, Honduras and Guatemala to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 through ensuring the human right to adequate food and guided policymakers in sharpening their national food security and nutrition policies and climate adaptation plans from the right to food perspective and in line with human rights-based standards. FAO assisted non-governmental actors to better understand their roles and implications of more coherent and accountable policy processes aimed at eradicating hunger, malnutrition in all its forms and poverty.

37. FAO partnered with the University of Central Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Nepal School of Social Science and Humanities to produce studies on the

gendered impact of the pandemic on the lives of rural women and men in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kenya, Niger, Rwanda, Uganda and Nepal. A Policy Dialogue was jointly organized by FAO, IFPRI and the CGIAR GENDER Platform to share key findings and recommendations drawn on survey data and policy analyses conducted in Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia. A report on heterogeneous impact of COVID-19 on rural households and a paper on impact of COVID-19 on women's roles in agriculture and their empowerment, and on the food security of the families left behind were initiated. The findings of these studies will be featured in the Report on the Status of Rural Women in Agriculture.

38. A series of webinars for parliamentarians are organized to raise the awareness on empowering women and youth as active agents of change and resilience in the response to COVID-19. FAO prepared guidance materials on the collection and analysis of sex- and age-disaggregated data and on producing the evidence to assess the impact of the pandemic, aiming to reduce gender inequalities and to support rural women's economic empowerment. Specific recommendations were made to support the most vulnerable with the adoption of policy measures to address gender-based violence, which has significantly increased as a result of COVID-19.

d. Trade and Food Safety Standards: Facilitating and accelerating food and agricultural trade during COVID-19 and beyond

39. FAO continued its core commodity-related monitoring and assessment activities, keeping a constant watch on global and national markets and providing forward-looking analyses that assess supply, demand and trade prospects, as well as the likely impacts of policy developments and other influential factors on commodity markets. Regular publications included the monthly FAO Food Price Index, the monthly Cereal Supply and Demand Brief, the monthly Food Price Monitoring and Analysis Bulletin, and the quarterly Crop Prospects and Food Situation report (December 2021 and March 2022 editions), in addition to various commodity specific reports⁸.

40. In response to COVID-19 and supporting global recovery efforts, FAO produced numerous publications to inform policy decisions and promote inclusive market and trade strategies and policies. For example, the report *Agricultural trade & policy responses during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic* examined the short-term changes in trade patterns and policy measures related to agricultural trade that countries adopted in response to the pandemic. The report *Agricultural trade in the Global South* analyzed, *inter alia*, trade-related trends and vulnerabilities in the global south, therefore facilitating recovery efforts. Such studies are important for drawing lessons and learning from experience, namely in the area of trade policies and measures.

41. In addition, capacity development support was provided at regional and country level. For example, relevant trade-related e-learning courses were organized and delivered in several regions and in various languages, while a number of projects continued being implemented at the country level. Another example of a relevant activity under this priority area is a trust-fund project financed by the Government of Japan. As part of the project, FAO analyzed the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters on agricultural supply chains and food systems. Based on these findings, draft guidelines to assist developing countries in the formulation of policies to increase the resilience of agricultural supply chains to external shocks will be produced.

42. Furthermore, FAO continued implementing numerous technical cooperation projects across the globe. These projects, as reported to the Council in previous occasions, aim to promote economic recovery post COVID-19, while supporting the development of sustainable and inclusive markets and trade.

43. Post COVID-19 recovery efforts have been affected by the war in Ukraine, which is having various repercussions across the world. In this context, efforts were complemented by activities to mitigate the impact of the war. Thanks to its core market intelligence activities, FAO responded swiftly to the crisis and issued on 11 March an information note on the importance of Ukraine and the

⁸ The list includes reports published since the 168th Session of Council (29 November - 4 December 2021)

Russian Federation for global agricultural market and the risks associated with the current conflict. An updated version of the note was issued on 25 March 2022.

e. Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery: Protecting the most vulnerable, promoting economic recovery and enhancing risk management capacities

44. “Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery” means promoting recovery interventions that contribute to address root causes of risks and vulnerabilities and enhance capacities of the most vulnerable and at risk smallholders, with particular focus on women, displaced people, and indigenous peoples. FAO is committed to build resilience across the humanitarian and development nexus in food crisis contexts, such as Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan and Syria, among others. For example in Afghanistan, FAO provided time-critical assistance to 24,000 vulnerable smallholder farming and herding households through nutrition assistance, cash+ interventions and distribution of agricultural-livelihood safeguarding inputs to women-headed households.

45. FAO also supported resilience building through support on food diversification and income generating activities to promote transformative economic recovery of agrifood systems affected by the measures to reduce COVID-19 transmission, which in many contexts collided with other shocks and stresses.

46. For example in Burkina Faso, where FAO interventions aim to build resilience capacities of agro-sylvo-pastoral communities who are being impacted by climate related hazards and in particular women and young people (hosts and IDPs) in the Boucle du Mouhoun, who were further weakened by the measures to reduce COVID-19 transmission, as these groups usually engage in informal trading activities to meet the needs of the family and particularly the children for whom they generally provide care. In Ethiopia, the country that was already facing the largest Desert Locust invasion in over 25 years and caused major damage to crops, pastures and rangelands, affecting livestock health and increasing their mortality; when COVID-19 pandemic started, and the restrictive measures resulted in a significant slowdown of agricultural support services, in particular animal treatment and vaccination, limited access to production inputs (fertilizers, seeds, livestock breeds, chemicals, and production capital), increased post-harvest losses especially for perishable crops; breaks in market supply chains, and loss of incomes from off-farm income generating activities.

47. In this context FAO supported vulnerable communities in Afar and Somali regions to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 and Desert Locusts by enhancing crop production, off-farm income generating activities, access to animal services and improved feed, food processing, storage, preparation and utilization.

48. The most vulnerable were safeguarded in rural but also urban settings, such as in Bangladesh where FAO developed a pilot peri-urban crop production system and safe marketplace to ensure availability of diverse and safe vegetables and fruits in peri-urban areas of Dhaka City to mitigate the Impact of COVID-19 Crisis on food security and nutrition. Concomitantly, work to improve rural livelihood and agriculture productivity through nutrition sensitive agro-technologies and nutritional improvement to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 of the hill farmers also took place.

49. Transformative economic recovery has been supported through the provision of technical assistance for the creation of decent employment and self-employment opportunities in agriculture (on-and off-farm) and agribusiness for youth and women in Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

50. FAO has also been working to strengthen multi-risk governance and to enhance the capacities of institutions to build resilience, just as done in Ecuador, where policies, programs, and strategies that foster intersectoral and interinstitutional are articulated to improve food security and nutrition.

f. Preventing the Next Zoonotic Pandemic: Strengthening and extending the One Health approach to avert animal-origin pandemics (PNP)

51. FAO’s Strategic Framework was endorsed in January 2022, with PNP being one of the outcomes under the One Health Priority Programme Area (OH PPA). To support programme growth

and upscale an integrated package of OH services to Members, FAO calls for expanded partnership through a multilateral 'Agrifood Systems and OH Programme Fund', designed to attract and pool resources to flexibly support key activities at global, regional and country level. Australia is the first to partner. Programmatic funds are also being mobilized, including from the United States Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, aligned to support the OH PPA programme of work, demand and implementation at country level. Funding sources build on existing programmes, including COVID R&R, to build a comprehensive programme approach. To support conceptualization and implementation of the OH PPA, five workstreams have been created with teams across divisions. The interdisciplinary OH Technical Working Group, including regional and decentralized offices, catalyzes synergies and delivery across the Organization.

52. In March 2022 [UNEP officially joined](#) FAO, OIE and WHO as equal partner through the Quadripartite MoU, to accelerate coordinated and collaborative efforts on OH implementation. The Quadripartite OH Joint Plan of Action (OH-JPA), with a joint vision for collective action and coalition building to build back better post COVID and to reduce the risk of future pandemics, has been developed under FAO's chair and is in the process of being introduced to Members. A Guidance Note for Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams is being prepared, to facilitate OH-JPA implementation and ensure adequate inclusion of OH in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Joined up resource mobilization and investment leverage are underway, building on existing mechanisms such as the Antimicrobial Resistance Multipartner Trust Fund (MPTF) and the Nature for Health MPTF, and bridging with the G20 Health and Finance Ministers Task team for Pandemic Preparedness and Response.

53. FAO regularly participates in WHO and OIE expert groups on SARS-CoV-2 at the animal-human interface to provide risk assessment, recommendations and guidance to Members on safe trade in animals and animal products, and detection in animals. A FAO/OIE/WHO joint statement on the '[Prioritization of monitoring SARS-CoV-2 infection in wildlife and preventing the formation of animal reservoirs](#)' was published in March 2022. To keep Members and partners informed of latest surveillance and research findings, the first edition of FAO's quarterly '[SARS-CoV-2 in animals - situation update](#)' was published on 15 February 2022. As part of the designation process of FAO Reference Centres for Zoonotic Coronaviruses, candidate laboratories met on 22 September 2021 discussed and agreed on priority areas of work and streamline their planned contributions.

54. Thirty-one projects are now actively linked under PNP, representing the regions Near East and North Africa, Asia and the Pacific, RNE, RAP, and RAF, as well as two global projects. In support of field implementation of PNP projects, two FAO guidance documents were published in September 2021: '[Recommendations for the Epidemiological Investigation of SARS-CoV-2 in Exposed Animals - SARS-CoV-2 detection in farmed and companion animals](#)' and '[Supplementary recommendations for Investigating the potential recombination of MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2 or other coronaviruses in camels](#)', which are already under implementation through FAO/WHO projects in the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates. The Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD) – a joint platform between Animal Production and Health Division/Joint Centre for Zoonotic and Anti-Microbial Resistance (NSAH/CJWZ) and OER – continues implementing FAO's largest OH capacity building program in 36 countries, strengthening countries' capacities to build and manage resilient health systems, with a focus on pandemic preparedness and response. On average, ECTAD trains over 5 000 professionals globally every year, about 30 percent of them are female. In Africa alone, 18 national OH Platforms were strengthened, providing countries with active multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms for OH operationalization.

g. Food Systems Transformation: “Building to transform” during response and recovery

55. The UN Food Systems Summit held in September 2021 has significantly contributed to a greater understanding of the agrifood system subject matter and its role in building back better during the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, the contribution of this priority area has also led to an increase in the mainstreaming of agrifood systems' related activities within FAO programmes and projects, as partners and FAO colleagues have become more conversant on the topic. For instance, in the Latin America region, activities are starting in Colombia, Ecuador and El Salvador to facilitate

strengthening and scaling up their school feeding programmes through the Sustainable Schools methodology. This approach contributes to ensuring improved food security and nutrition of school-age children, which can provide sustainability to the local economies, while promoting the transformation of agrifood systems and preventing food loss and waste. The intervention is instrumental in enabling programmes recovery from the disruptions caused by COVID-19 on different sectors and stakeholders involved.

56. In the Africa region, the project ‘Protecting the diets of the most vulnerable people as part of COVID-19 response and recovery program’ provides another example of mainstreaming. This project also falls under the Global Action Plan (GAP) on Child Wasting which acknowledges that child wasting requires evidence-based policies aimed at enhancing national health, food and social protection systems. The project is operational in Kenya and Malawi where food security has been weakened as a result of the pandemic caused by government measures enacted to contain the virus, which reduced incomes, in addition to disrupting supply chains and food markets. Addressing the impact of COVID-19 from both a supply and demand perspective has therefore become an imperative in order to redress the situation and ensure the local populations have access to nutritious, affordable and sustainably produced local food in the long-term. The project saw the development of market assessments in selected countries, revealing that price is still the main constraint limiting the purchase of nutritious food. The pandemic has worsened the food security situation, with about 50 percent of consumers experiencing reduced purchasing power. As such, the main objectives of this project have been to 1) improve access to affordable, healthy and nutritious local food – including animal sourced foods, pulses, fruits and vegetables – in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and 2) document good practices that are part of the GAP on Child Wasting.

57. Research carried out, has showed that agrifood enterprises, after succumbing to the shocks and disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, have been mostly negatively impacted in areas related to agrifood transportation, exacerbating already existing logistical constraints present along domestic value chains. Policy guidance to governments under the aegis of the area of work have therefore recommended investment measures that remove logistical bottlenecks including transport and mobility restrictions that impact raw materials, goods and labour in domestic and regional markets. Research also showed that agrifood enterprises, in particular SMEs, are more susceptible to national disruptions, as evidenced during the pandemic. Therefore, the stimulation of demand for domestically produced agrifood products needs to become an essential investment component of any food systems transformation strategy. As such, the majority of projects under focus provide some level of support to the strengthening of domestic food value chains.

III. The Food Coalition

58. The G20 Leader’s declaration (2021) confirmed the Food Coalition as a flexible coordination mechanism for COVID-19 response and recovery. Subsequently a portfolio of 10 selected proposals was prepared and activities involving ten countries are planned and funding requirements articulated. The Food Coalition represents a unique multi-stakeholder platform that seeks to act and accelerate the pace of change towards agrifood systems transformation especially in this time of rising food insecurity, intensification of climate shocks, and instability for global food and agriculture.

59. The Food Coalition will be structured around five complementary pillars (structured in order to be considered Sub-Programmes for activity management and monitoring). These include: Pillar 1 - Response to and recovery from global crises; Pillar 2 - Advocacy for solutions; Pillar 3 - Support and follow-up to G20 Matera Declaration; Pillar 4 - Longer-term solutions developed to transform agrifood systems; and Pillar 5 (considered Cross-Cutting) - Knowledge sharing and transfer of experts/expertise.

60. The Food Coalition will also be managed in FAO as an “Umbrella Programme” to respond quickly to needs and priorities and to deliver in a more agile manner the different contributions received, in line with an overall Programmatic Results Framework developed along the five Pillars.

IV. Key lessons learned and relevant policy actions

61. Criticality of **robust monitoring systems** for real time data and analysis, including early warning systems, price monitoring and identification of vulnerability hotspots and critical nodes and bottlenecks in agrifood systems as well as risk monitoring and evaluation of actions and policies. The critical aspect in this regard would be proper targeting. FIES data collected before and during COVID-19 has shown that there were significant new hotspots of hunger that the existing listings were not capturing.
62. Creating a strong **link between short, medium and long-term policy decisions** and measures, ensuring that recovery from COVID-19 pandemic is inclusive in the national planning and investment, with strong focus on the most vulnerable groups, women, youth and indigenous people. Emphasis should be given to women as the group hardest hit by the Pandemic in the agrifood systems.
63. The significant role of **digital technologies** is proven and universal access to broadband should be promoted.
64. COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated inequalities highlighting the need for policies and strategies that would **address structural issues related to inequalities**.
65. The Pandemic had a significant impact on the middle class because of the high level of involvement in informal work and informal economy, and the containment measures have strongly affected their economic activities and income earning. Immediate and concrete responses would be required to ensure their **decent work and economic undertakings in the informal economy**.