

**Thematic Evaluation Series**

# **Real-time evaluation of FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme**

## **Annex 3. Humanitarian response**

# Contents

<b>Abbreviations and acronyms .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Executive summary.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Purpose of the evaluation .....	1
1.2 Scope and key evaluation questions.....	2
1.3 Theory of change.....	3
1.4 Conceptual approach and methodology .....	3
1.5 Limitations .....	6
<b>2. Findings.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Relevance .....	7
2.2 Coherence.....	10
2.3 Inclusiveness .....	11
2.4 Timeliness .....	13
2.5 Business continuity.....	15
<b>3. Good practices and lessons learned .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Appendix 1. People interviewed.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Appendix 2. Typology of GHRP interventions.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix 3. UN agencies contribution to the Syrian socio-economic impact assessment of     COVID-19 .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Appendix 4. Theory of change: Priority Area 1 – COVID-19 Humanitarian Response     and Recovery Programme.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Appendix 5. Evaluation matrix .....</b>	<b>29</b>

## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
FAO	Food Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GHRP	Global Humanitarian Response Plan
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
OER	Office of Emergencies and Resilience
PPE	Personal protective equipment
RTE	Real-time evaluation

## Executive summary

1. This is the real-time evaluation (RTE) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) contribution to the United Nations (UN) COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) launched by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in April 2020. The GHRP addresses the impacts of COVID-19 and safeguarding livelihoods of the most vulnerable in food-crisis contexts. FAO's contribution to the GHRP is the priority area with the biggest resource allocation for FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme.
2. **This RTE of FAO's humanitarian response to COVID-19 aims to:** i) assess the relevance, timeliness, coherence, inclusiveness and business continuity practices of FAO's humanitarian response; and ii) identify good practices and lessons learned to inform the design and implementation of future similar interventions. The RTE will also feed into the UN's Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the GHRP.
3. The RTE covered the period from January 2020 until June 2021 and all the four pillars of the GHRP:
  - i. **Pillar 1: Rolling out data collection and analysis.** Largely based on remotely collected real-time data, the ensuing analysis aims to support evidenced-based programming.
  - ii. **Pillar 2: Ensuring availability of and stabilizing access to food for the most acutely food-insecure populations.** Focuses on ensuring the continuity of essential agricultural production and food systems' operations and mitigating the pandemic's impact upon vulnerable people.
  - iii. **Pillar 3: Ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations is a key determinant of food security and nutrition.** Centres on supporting continuous functioning of local food production and markets, value chains for the vulnerable smallholder farmers and food workers, and the critical food supply for vulnerable urban areas.
  - iv. **Pillar 4: Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission is crucial to maintaining food supplies.** FAO's awareness raising targets those hard to reach and who have limited access to basic health services or to media.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic is a multi-dimensional crisis that exacerbates pre-existing inequities and fragilities, particularly for people living in settings affected by humanitarian crises prior to and during the pandemic. In terms of conceptual approach and methodology, the contextual factors and the findings provide the evidence for capturing and analysing good practices and lessons learned. Good practices are processes or activities that yield success or at least meaningful results. Learning is an experiential sense-making process. Lessons learned take into account what (how) would be done differently (i.e. behavioural change) to achieve a desired outcome. Good practices are proven to work; whilst lessons learned communicate insights and understanding in how to arrive or implement the good practices. The selected good practices and lessons used the following criteria: i) concisely capture context from which it is derived; ii) potentially applicable to different context; iii) considers a clear application domain; and iv) guides action (UNFCCC, 2015). The RTE used the mixed method of questionnaire, extensive desk review, virtual key informant interviews with FAO headquarters, subregional, regional and country offices, and key partners and donors. The RTE focused on four countries under food crisis: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Syrian Arab Republic.

## Findings

### i. Relevance

- FAO prepared a sound strategy for its component of the UN Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan. At country levels, FAO's COVID-19 humanitarian response was in line with the country's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and relevant towards the prevention of the further deterioration of the food crisis, particularly aiming for the most vulnerable. However, the prospects of transitioning towards resilience and long-term development are yet to be established, given the lack of institutional strategies, for example social protection and seed sector development.
- The challenge of designing interventions given the lack of robust analytics at the onset of COVID-19 were likely offset by previous analytics on agri-food sector analysis, HRP, and existing coordinating mechanisms at country levels. At the onset of COVID-19, the data may not be rigorous for publications but are highly likely good enough to inform the design of the short-term interventions.

### ii. Coherence

- FAO's COVID-19 humanitarian response was informed and facilitated through the coordination with: i) the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); ii) Ministries, primarily for food and agriculture; iii) the World Health Organization (WHO); and iv) local level coordination with community leaders, local governments and civil society organizations. Despite some trade-off, the coordination provided a shared understanding of the developing crisis, including the most pressing humanitarian needs and the estimated number of people who need assistance. The consolidation and updates of data helped inform the joint strategic planning, at a time of greater uncertainty and stress.
- Given the major significance of agriculture in the four focus countries, FAO country offices as a specialized UN agency, were appreciated by the partners and donors for the technical support for safeguarding agricultural livelihoods. Whilst FAO capacities differ by country, the FAO country offices leveraged their food and agriculture technical expertise and their track record in complex emergency context. Especially at well-staffed and well-resourced country offices, FAO's operational presence within various regions of the country, country level partnerships and local networks enabled an improvement towards a coherent COVID-19 humanitarian response.

### iii. Inclusiveness

- To ensure the application of the principle of "Leave no one behind" (LNOB) FAO considered the combination of three layers of targeting: i) vulnerability of the area; ii) targeting vulnerable peoples (e.g. women, youth, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, internally displaced people, people with disabilities) within the area; and iii) identifying the specific households most vulnerable to the crisis.
- The collaborations at inter-agency and national levels enabled the joint identification and registration of beneficiaries, facilitated prioritization, avoidance of duplication and ensuring that the most vulnerable are reached. The joint Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) is a promising mechanism of monitoring and addressing accountability to the beneficiaries. In addition, the sharing of gender analysis and a common mechanism to monitor gender-based violence (GBV) together with the beneficiaries are likewise promising.

- As standard operations, FAO carried out a seasonal outcome monitoring to assess beneficiaries' satisfaction and adoption of the humanitarian interventions. In addition, FAO routinely collates lessons learned that are often based on experiences working with the most vulnerable. Whilst all these are good practice, resilience outcomes from a systems perspective have yet to be conducted systematically.

iv. Timeliness

- FAO's humanitarian response was generally made timely through the: i) high level management steer and coordination particularly amongst FAO departments and at regional, subregional and country offices; and ii) FAO's existing humanitarian expertise, strategy and operational structure. However, country offices and partners consistently expressed that even in emergencies and surge capacity, FAO need to further simplify procedures to avoid the delays and stresses for time-critical and season-sensitive procurement and provision of inputs to smallholder agricultural/herder households.
- For the entire umbrella programme FAO mobilized considerable resources amounting to USD 209 million. The humanitarian response received the largest contribution at 45 percent of the fund. Africa was the largest funded region at nearly 40 percent; whilst Afghanistan was the largest funded country (FAO, 2021a).

v. Business continuity

- Unlike other crises, the COVID-19 pandemic also affected FAO's own operations and personnel well-being, at all levels from headquarters to country offices. Despite such challenges, FAO senior management at all levels managed a good business continuity that addressed safety and well-being of personnel; continuing core functions. However, responding to a crisis whilst being affected by the crisis have had its toll on work overload and stress. A few of the regional offices expressed that they could have been more involved in the formulation and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Whilst FAO consistently talked about the "re-purposing" or "re-programming" of ongoing projects in response to COVID-19, technically, the RTE only found one example of actual re-purposing or re-programming. All other changes were about changing the mode of implementation and were part of very sound adaptive management.
- The "silver lining" of the dark cloud of COVID-19 is that it accelerated a number of necessary changes such as: the silos within FAO were diminished through the leadership commitment and core management practice to work across all departments and across offices; and localization were accelerated delegating more decision-making and implementation role for local partners and beneficiaries; etc. Whether such momentum will be sustained remains to be seen.

## **Good practices and lessons learned**

### **Case 1: Timely assessment of major unknown crisis.**

#### **Context**

Travel restrictions challenged data gathering to inform the timely assessments, decisions, design of interventions and mobilize resources; worse for the hard-to-reach populations.

#### **Good practice 1**

- i. Apply lessons from previous crises (e.g. Ebola virus) to anticipate actions.
- ii. Use existing data and information to extrapolate the initial COVID-19 vulnerability assessments.
- iii. Conduct a series of joint assessments for wider coverage and targeting.
- iv. Leverage FAO's systems perspective and expertise on agri-food chain, strong presence in the country and the track record of delivery.

#### **Lessons learned 1**

- i. Manage trade-off: timelines versus rigour through time, space and institutions.
- ii. For reliability and ownership, acknowledge and address weakness in analytics.
- iii. Link "data for action" to "data that demonstrates resilience outcomes".
- iv. Invest in a systematic (digitized) data sharing mechanism.

### **Case 2: Responding to a compounding crisis in a protracted crisis.**

#### **Context**

- i. COVID-19 is a multi-dimensional crisis that exacerbates pre-existing inequities and fragilities within acute food crisis, conflict, natural hazards-induced disasters, climate shocks, economic shocks, displacements, chronic poverty.
- ii. Increasing magnitude, unpredictability and complexity of compounding crisis.

#### **Good practice 2**

- i. Maintain critical humanitarian operations, coupled with anticipatory actions for the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. Integrate COVID-19 Global Response Programme into each of the country's Humanitarian Response Plan.
- iii. Provide consistent technical support mechanisms to ensure smooth operation and resolution of technical issues.

#### **Lessons learned 2**

- i. Functional, ready-for-action humanitarian expertise, strategy and operations is a must.
- ii. Strategize to link demonstratable outcomes of humanitarian assistance with the long-term resilience of agri-food systems.
- iii. Simultaneously address the underlying structural drivers of (e.g. seeds) insecurity in the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus.
- iv. Multi-stakeholder collaboration for joint planning and joint outcomes.

### **Case 3: Reaching out and responding to the most vulnerable.**

#### **Context**

COVID-19 exacerbate vulnerabilities; deteriorates people's productive assets and coping strategies. Leaving no one behind becomes even more important but more challenging to implement.

#### **Good practice 3**

- i. Strengthening the agency of local communities for ownership and outcome delivery.
- ii. Innovations addressed both the context risks and the risk of the actual response.
- iii. Communication used multiple media with coherent message and in the local language.
- iv. Joint Accountability to Affected Populations enabled a common mechanism to monitor gender-based violence.

#### **Lessons learned 3**

- v. Systematic understanding of points of vulnerabilities in the food production chain and adjusting the mode of interventions.
- vi. Strengthening peoples' agency needs to be integrated in holistic and long-term approaches.
- vii. Localization is cost-effective and leverages local knowledge and proximity to the beneficiaries.

### **Case 4: Responding to a crisis while in a crisis.**

#### **Context**

COVID-19 also affected FAO's own operations and well-being of personnel at all levels, from headquarters to country offices. Restrictions in movements made responding to beneficiaries more challenging.

#### **Good practice 4**

- i. Business continuity plan: focus on both health and safety of personnel and continuity of key operations.
- ii. Decisive response from high-level senior management swiftly reaching and steering across FAO.

#### **Lessons learned 4**

- i. Leadership commitment and actions are important in breaking silos to mobilize for action.
- ii. FAO's decentralized operation needs to be better optimized since they are at the forefront of the crisis.



# 1. Introduction

5. At its 129th session, the Programme Committee of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) requested that the Office of Evaluation (OED) conduct a real-time evaluation (RTE) of FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme (RRP). The umbrella programme has seven key priority areas (PA) namely, PA1. Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP); PA2. Data for Decision-making; PA3. Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty; PA4. Trade and Food Safety Standards; PA5. Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery; PA6. Preventing the Next Zoonotic Pandemic; and PA7. Food Systems Transformation: Building back better during response and recovery.
6. The umbrella programme was set up primarily as a resource mobilization initiative, with an estimated target totalling USD 1.32 billion. As of early August 2021, the contracted mobilized resources were registered with a total budget of USD 209 749 655 (almost 16 percent of the total appeal) (FAO, 2021g). Approximately 88 percent of the budget (USD 184 294 291) originates from voluntary contributions, while 12 percent is from Technical Cooperation Programmes (TCP) (USD 25 455 364). As of July 2021, confirmed and pledged contributions were projected at USD 336 million.<sup>1</sup>
7. This component of the RTE covers priority area 1 of the RRP, which include the four pillars<sup>2</sup> of the GHRP:
  - i. **Pillar 1: Rolling out data collection and analysis.** Largely based on remotely collected real-time data, the ensuing analysis aims to support evidenced-based programming.
  - ii. **Pillar 2: Ensuring availability of and stabilizing access to food for the most acutely food-insecure populations.** Focuses on ensuring the continuity of essential agricultural production and food systems' operations and mitigating the pandemic's impact upon vulnerable people.
  - iii. **Pillar 3: Ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations is a key determinant of food security and nutrition.** Centres on supporting continuous functioning of local food production and markets, value chains for the vulnerable smallholder farmers and food workers, and the critical food supply for vulnerable urban areas.
  - iv. **Pillar 4: Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission is crucial to maintaining food supplies.** FAO's awareness raising targets those hard to reach and who have limited access to basic health services or to media.

## 1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

8. The evaluation of FAO's humanitarian response has two intended purposes:
  - i. Assess the relevance, coherence, inclusiveness, timeliness and the business continuity of FAO's humanitarian response.
  - ii. Identify the good practices and lessons learned so as to inform the design and implementation of future similar interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> 14 July 2021 email communication from Beth Bechdol.

<sup>2</sup> For a typology of the four pillars see Appendix 2.

9. The RTE findings will also feed into the UN's Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the GHRP.
10. The primary intended user of the RTE is FAO programme management, related technical and resource mobilization divisions at headquarters, decentralized offices in selected food crisis and COVID-19 countries. In particular, personnel working on PA1 and PA5 were more involved in the process.
11. This component of the RTE formed a dedicated core learning group (CLG) to increase the effectiveness of the process and products of the RTE by:
  - i. serving as a forum for discussion and technical input;
  - ii. providing feedback/comments on findings and possible recommendations;
  - iii. advocating for adopting good practices, lessons learned and suggestions for improvement.
12. The CLG included representatives from PA1 as well as from relevant units/offices (such as the country offices that are part of the country case studies) (see Appendix 1).

## 1.2 Scope and key evaluation questions

13. The RTE covered the period from January 2020 to June 2021, irrespective of budget source or geographic location. So far, from March to the end of October 2020 FAO delivered livelihoods support (e.g. cash transfers, agricultural inputs and technical assistance) to 2 670 624 households (approximately 15 044 444 people), and approximately 44 percent of the beneficiaries are women. In addition, more than 5 million rural people have been reached by awareness raising campaigns to reduce the transmission along the value chain (FAO, 2021b).
14. The RTE assessed the progress made with the implementation of the programme and was intended to provide timely feedback/early assessments to foster learning and accountability. As a first step of the RTE, a stocktaking study was conducted to identify potential areas to focus; leading to PA1-GHRP being selected as one of the four components of the RTE. The largest proportion of the programme's budget was earmarked by donors for the GHRP, at 29.91 percent (FAO, 2021a).
15. PA1 encompasses FAO's contribution to the United Nations' COVID-19 GHRP launched by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in April 2020. The GHRP addresses the impacts of COVID-19 and safeguarding livelihoods of the most vulnerable in food-crisis contexts. The Global Report on Food Crises (FSIN and Global Network Against Food, 2021) defines food crisis countries as those with areas *"where a large share of the population is acutely food insecure and in need of urgent humanitarian action, as a result of a significant shock and where the government requires external assistance to cope with the impact of a shock on food security and nutrition"*.
16. In response to the RTE objectives, five key evaluation questions (KEQ) were formulated, with corresponding sub-questions pertaining to good practices and lesson learned:
  - i. EQ1. **Relevance:** How did FAO ensure that its COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) was relevant to the food crisis countries?
  - ii. EQ2. **Coherence:** How did FAO ensure external coherence in its COVID 19 humanitarian response (PA1)?

- iii. EQ3. **Inclusiveness:** How did the COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) ensure that the principle of “Leave no one behind” was followed to meet the specific needs of the vulnerable and marginalized peoples (women, minorities, migrants, refugees, internally displaced people, etc.)?
- iv. EQ4. **Timeliness:** How did FAO ensure that the PA1 interventions were timely?
- v. EQ5. **Business Continuity:** How was the COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) affected by FAO’s business continuity practices in the context of the unfolding COVID-19 crisis?

### 1.3 Theory of change

- 17. For the purpose of the RTE, a theory of change (TOC) for PA1 was constructed solely for the internal use of the RTE to better understand the design of the programme and its intended results. The high-level TOC (see Appendix 4) maps pathways that approximated how the Organization’s interventions were expected to contribute to achieving the programmes goals (i.e. mitigating the impact of COVID-19 and contribute to building the long-term resilience of food systems and livelihoods).
- 18. Although FAO can act at different stages along the pathways identified, a simple way of explaining the causal chains starts with having partnerships, systems, resources and tools to deliver large, remotely managed programmes in place. From these different components, four higher level outcomes (one for each of the priority area pillars identified above) can be achieved:
  - i. **Timely, rapid and targeted response** by the humanitarian community and governments to avert a deterioration in food security by having recovery and response programmes take anticipatory and remedial actions. For this to occur, *ongoing, near real-time assessment and monitoring data on the food security impacts of COVID-19 is required.*
  - ii. **Availability and stable access to food by acutely food-insecure populations** ensured deriving from, among others, *timely input distribution and access to storage facilities.*
  - iii. **Continuity of the critical food supply chain** for the most vulnerable will help ensure their ability to continue producing, selling or buying food. Hence, the need to support the *critical food supply chain so that it remains functioning.*
  - iv. **Food supply chain actors are at a reduced risk of virus transmission** stemming from their increased awareness of the mitigating measures to take in line with the World Health Organization (WHO) guidance.
  - v. The integration of **anticipatory action in the recovery interventions** aims to consider the context relevant in forecast for the coming season, and to plan interventions that are better tailored to the seasonal challenges ahead.
  - vi. The above interventions are closely integrated with **boosting smallholder resilience for recovery** (PA5) contributing towards the outcome of strengthening the long-term resilience of the agri-food systems and livelihoods.

### 1.4 Conceptual approach and methodology

- 19. The COVID-19 pandemic is a multi-dimensional crisis that exacerbates pre-existing inequities and fragilities particularly for people living in settings affected by humanitarian crises prior to and during the pandemic. Hence, the context – over - time factors are an essential dimension to the RTE and thus set the framework for data gathering and analysis.

20. In real-time, the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic is still unfolding in terms of magnitude, severity and complexity, and the impact to the agri-food systems of the most vulnerable. COVID-19 is a crisis on top of acute food crisis where conflict, natural hazards-induced disasters, climate shocks and stresses, economic shocks, displacements and chronic poverty prevails. The RTE is aware of the complexities of the external factors and operational conditions, which make programming fluid.
21. COVID-19 exposed structural vulnerabilities of local and global food systems, hitting the most economically vulnerable households particularly hard. Rural women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic that has further reduced their economic opportunities and access to nutritious food, while also increasing their workloads and risks of gender-based violence. The most affected countries are those with areas in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 3 categories or above, and many have been in this phase for at least two consecutive years. Phase 3 categories requires urgent action to protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps; whilst those in Phase 4 require urgent action to save lives and livelihoods (FSIN and Global Network Against Food, 2021). In this context, PA1 interventions are geared towards the prevention of further deterioration of the food crisis, particularly for the most vulnerable.
22. The contextual factors provide an important reference for both capturing and analysing lessons learned and good practices for the purpose of the RTE. Good practices are examples of processes or activities that yield success or at least meaningful results. Learning is an experiential sense-making process. Lessons learned take into account what (how) would be done differently (i.e. behavioural change) to achieve a desired outcome. Good practices are proven to work; whilst lessons learned communicate insights and understanding in how to arrive or implement the good practices. The RTE will involve an iterative and participatory gathering and analysing of good practices and lessons learned focusing on observed changes in behaviour and practices; and analysis on facilitating and hindering factors. The selected good practices and lessons will consider the following criteria: i) concisely capture context from which it is derived; ii) potentially applicable to different context; iii) considers a clear application domain; and iv) guides action (UNFCCC, 2015). Outside the domain of this RTE, the application of good practices and lessons learned will have to go through a specific reflection, sense-making process and adaption of each individual and organization, within their own specific context.
23. FAO's humanitarian work has always been intertwined with resilience. FAO works towards increasing the resilience of people, their food systems and livelihoods to threats and crises. Resilience is defined as: "*The ability to prevent disasters and crises as well as to anticipate, absorb, accommodate or recover from them in a timely, efficient and sustainable manner. This includes protecting, restoring, and improving livelihoods systems in the face of threats that impact agriculture, nutrition, food security and food safety.*" The recovery interventions contribute to address root causes of vulnerabilities and risks, in line with the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus, and therefore, building-forward better. For the COVID-19 humanitarian response, there is a high degree of overlap in project interventions, areas and target populations between PA1 and PA5 (see TOC). Since December 2020, the COVID-19 response in food crisis countries has been fully integrated into the overall HRP. As such, this RTE will not make unnecessary distinctions between the two.
24. To respond to the evaluation questions and address the contextual factors that set the framework for data gathering and analysis for the humanitarian response in food crisis countries, the evaluation will use the following mixed-methods:

- i. **Evaluation questionnaire** for key stakeholders in the four food crisis countries selected (see ii) where FAO's COVID-19 PA1 interventions were being conducted.<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire intended to: collect a rapid overview of the countries' COVID-19 PA1 work, identification of partners, donors and (preliminary) country and project reports. The information collected fed into the country focus analysis.
- ii. **Country focus analysis** was conducted for four countries selected based on the following criteria:
  - regional representation of food crisis countries with complex disaster risk management, including conflict;
  - one or two countries with large budget size for COVID-19, and one or two countries with severe needs but less successful in fundraising;
  - work focus/examples on gender-responsive interventions targeting the most vulnerable groups.

The sample covered the different pillars of work under PA1. The selected countries were: Afghanistan (Asia), South Sudan (Eastern Africa), Syrian Arab Republic (Middle East) and Burkina Faso (West Africa). Unless otherwise stated, the RTE integrated the findings, good practices and lessons learned for all the four countries. Specific examples from each of the countries were used to illustrate a common analysis for the four countries.

- iii. **Extensive desk review** was conducted to include project documents such as the COVID-19 vulnerability and food security assessments, GHRP plans and reports at global, subregional and country levels, annual reports and situation reports.
  - iv. **Key informant interviews** were conducted virtually with stakeholders in particular, FAO personnel at headquarters, subregional, regional and country offices, PA1 leaders, key partners and key donors (see Appendix 1).
25. For triangulation, the RTE analysed the causal links between the findings, good practices and lessons learned. The analysis of the findings was used as evidence to inform the good practices and lessons learned. The identified good practices served as the basis for the formulation of lessons learned, following the criteria identified above. Based on the analysis of the response to the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the identified lessons learned were intended to provide insights and understanding in how to arrive or implement the good practices (see section 3).

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<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Haiti, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, Zimbabwe.

## 1.5 Limitations

#	Limitations/Risks	Mitigation measures
1	At the operational level, the humanitarian interventions are still in the process of implementation and/or entering a new phase, with reports still forthcoming. Hence, data and analysis on actual results are still meagre. In addition, with travel restrictions, shut down of offices, health concerns of personnel and their families, and additional workload, FAO's humanitarian response to COVID-19 is being undertaken alongside the challenges of business continuity.	The evaluation team circulated a questionnaire that was sent to selected food crisis and COVID-19 country offices to have clarity on the availability of data. The evaluation team identified key focal points in selected food crisis and COVID-19 country offices who could support in sharing reports (situation reports, annual report) that served the purpose of the evaluation.
2	Inability to conduct face-to-face group work not only reduced the ability to engage in a process that benefits from highly participatory and dynamic interactions but also reduced the opportunities for focusing participants time/attention dedicated to the exercise.	The evaluation team made extensive use of evaluative materials (such as the stocktaking exercise) and reports produced by FAO for OCHA, Senior Management, donors and partners on the humanitarian response. The evaluation team also made extensive use of the online interviews and the feedback from the core learning group.
3	In order to comply with the "do no harm" principle, the evaluation was unable, due to the ongoing pandemic, to interview project beneficiaries, thus missing an important voice.	The RTE was upfront on this limitation and relied on vulnerability assessments, evaluations reports (to identify the voice of vulnerable groups among them), and other relevant documents that meet the purpose of the evaluation.

## 2. Findings

### 2.1 Relevance

#### **How did FAO ensure that its COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) was relevant to the food crisis countries?**

**Finding 1.** FAO's rapid assessments of the developing trends that could potentially disrupt the food supply and agri-food chain, at macro-level and at micro-levels, informed the design of FAO's short-term COVID-19 humanitarian response and the resource mobilization. At the global level, FAO prepared a sound strategy for its component of the UN Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan. At country level, FAO's COVID-19 humanitarian response was relevant towards the prevention of the further deterioration of the food crisis, particularly aiming for the most vulnerable, whose coping mechanisms were already severely stressed even before the pandemic struck. In addition, the COVID-19 humanitarian response was in line with the country's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). However, the prospects of transitioning towards resilience and long-term development are yet to be established, given the lack of institutional strategies, for example social protection and seed sector development.

26. The four focus countries of the RTE have been facing a protracted and compounded crisis for decades. COVID-19 added another layer of crisis. In this regard, whilst maintaining and securing existing critical humanitarian operations, from March to June 2020, FAO provided immediate and short-term responses at the onset of the pandemic; with the objectives of preventing the health crisis to further aggravate the food crisis. These responses were generally made up of: i) rapid assessments to inform evidence-based response; ii) adapting standard FAO humanitarian response; and iii) providing safety guidelines and personal protective equipment (PPE) to prevent the risks of transmission. By December 2020, the COVID-19 response was integrated in the country's regular HRP.
27. FAO applied the lessons from previous crises, such as the Ebola virus disease (EVD) in West Africa in 2014. FAO took note of the direct impact movement restrictions and disease containment efforts had on food availability, access, utilization and violence - particularly gender-based violence (GBV). The assessments and interventions for COVID-19 aimed to apply lessons on the importance of maintaining and upscaling food security interventions for the most vulnerable populations, alongside the health sector's efforts to avert the spread of infection, whilst protecting livelihoods and food security and mitigating the risk of GBV.
28. For its component of the UN Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan, FAO pursued a two-pronged approach: i) maintaining and securing existing critical humanitarian operations; and ii) anticipatory actions to safeguard livelihoods and protect the critical food supply chain to mitigate the secondary effects of the pandemic (FAO, 2020a).
29. The typology of interventions is similar to FAO's regular humanitarian interventions related to social protection, with highly relevant and timely modifications for safety measures and sensitization to minimize physical contacts to avoid the virus transmission (cash transfer through electronic payments, avoid large gatherings). The focus was on: i) keeping the trade and local markets functioning (disinfecting markets and provision for storage); ii) helping avoid negative coping mechanism (e.g. selling of livelihood assets, reducing the quantity and quality of food intake and exploitation of vulnerable groups); iii) ensuring next season agricultural production (e.g. provision of crop inputs and provisions for livestock and training); iv) providing additional sources of income and nutrition through vegetable home gardening at the rural and urban areas; and vi) minimizing the aggravation of conflict (e.g. access to water and pasture lands).

30. In terms of social protection, FAO's expertise was applied to analyse the possible COVID-19 exposures of the vulnerable people in the agri-food chains. Minimizing the exposure is combined with livelihood support to minimize impacts on people's crops and livestock production and food and nutrition security. This is a particular challenge in food crisis countries where there are either non-existing or very minimal social protection schemes. Whilst social protection is not necessarily FAO's strength, its innovation with the CASH+<sup>4</sup> and voucher schemes<sup>5</sup> are based on a well thought through concept and modality. FAO normally provide the technical expertise to the cash transfer schemes of governments and other institutions (e.g. WFP).
31. In response to COVID-19, FAO modified social protection interventions: i) the modality from conditional to unconditional to give greater flexibility to the beneficiaries; and ii) the delivery mechanism, e.g. from cash to electronic transfer when connecting facilities and the required conditions (systems, procedures, personnel) are available. In hard-to-reach areas these were often not possible. In addition, voucher schemes were implemented whereby FAO provided direct link between suppliers and the beneficiaries. This market-based approach helped reinforce the value chain with facilitated access to quality seeds, feed, veterinary supplies, etc. In addition, this is a good basis for strengthening people's agency by enabling them to make and act on their own needs and decisions. However, the cash transfers under COVID-19 humanitarian interventions were not always part of a social protection programme as the humanitarian interventions were conducted under short time period (six to nine months); whereas social protection scheme needs a long-term perspective that strengthens institutions; including prospects leading to financial inclusion. In addition, resilience building that focuses on further strengthening peoples' agency such as linkages with local structures, for example of saving and loans association, and applying principles the Dimitra Clubs<sup>6</sup> were not apparent in the COVID-19 humanitarian interventions.
32. On seeds, a key element of FAO's standard humanitarian responses, including during COVID-19, is to ensure that farmers can access good quality seeds of adapted and productive varieties of crops, in order to assist recovery, ensure next season's production, or to diversify or augment sources of food. The most common approach used and decades long practiced is the direct seed distribution (DSD). This involves procurement of seeds, via national or international tenders, and distributed at no-cost to farmers. Another mode is through the input trade fairs, where suppliers are assembled and given the means (e.g. vouchers) to buy their own choice of seeds or other inputs. Cash, when provided as part of emergency response, may also be used by farmers to purchase seeds or other productive inputs. Hence, enabling farmers the choice to buy their own seeds, inputs or to choose something else. In avoidance of large gathering of crowds due to the pandemic, seed fairs and vouchers were largely curtailed. In addition to seeds, FAO provides technical training on good agricultural practices and integrated pest management, or other topics to build farmers' resilience. In South Sudan for example, the 2020 Emergency Livelihoods Response Programme (ELRP),<sup>7</sup> within which the COVID-19 response had been integrated, supported 851 074 farming households through the provision of 8 696 tonnes of seeds of

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<sup>4</sup> To maximize impact and sustainability, the provision of unconditional cash transfers to beneficiaries is complemented with productive inputs, assets, activities and/or technical training. The cash provided to beneficiaries enables them to address their immediate food and other basic needs while the "plus" component promotes their engagement in productive activities (FAO, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Beneficiaries receive vouchers that they can redeem for goods and services (e.g. seeds, fertilizers, tools, animal feed, veterinary supplies, etc.) at selected shops (FAO, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Such as autonomy and ownership, social mobilization and governance (FAO, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> The ELRP is FAO's multi-year multi-donor humanitarian response programme designed to protect vulnerable crisis-hit populations against hunger, malnutrition and destitution through livelihood assistance to farmers, herders and fisherfolk in the conflict-affected areas of South Sudan (FAO, 2020b)



assorted field-crops<sup>8</sup> and 105 tonnes of vegetables,<sup>9</sup> which farmers plant together with their own farm-saved seeds.

33. Generally, the decades of dependence on massive and repeated seeds aid<sup>10</sup> is a major concern for sustainability. Repeated seed-related aid has become the norm in many parts of Africa.<sup>11</sup> The lack of a functional seed sector that is responsive to smallholder farmers is a major driver of seed insecurity in many countries. For example, the 2018 Seed System Security Assessment in South Sudan found that the formal seed system (mostly small seed companies in the Equatorial region) produced only modest quantities of seeds, and normally sold two-thirds of this directly to the humanitarian organizations rather than to individual farmers as clients. Whilst FAO sees the problem of resilience and sustainability, there is scope for further improvement of the resilience strategy and especially for the seed sector development in the country.<sup>12</sup> FAO South Sudan is involved in building assets and skills, research and development, seed value chain support. This could be further enhanced to include setting policy and legislations for the development of a sustainable and demand-driven seed sector. This is a medium- to long-term undertaking, and a very complex task especially in the context of a country in a protracted crisis. At the same time, for the immediate context, there are efforts to support farmer managed seeds system, which provides 85 percent of seeds in the country and has been found to be resilient even in highly stressed situation. In addition, the best practice of helping farmers save their own seeds especially in protracted crisis and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sperling, 2020) needs further support.
34. FAO Africa, for example, has a good resilience framework (FAO, 2020c). However, globally, clear links for transitioning the COVID-19 humanitarian response to resilience and development are missing in terms of concrete plans and pathways. Even as the COVID-19 humanitarian has been integrated in the country's HRP, the resilience part is not articulated. Whilst humanitarian action is part of FAO's mandate, FAO's niche and the expectations of donors and partners is on FAO utilizing its agri-food systems expertise for the transition of humanitarian assistance into resilience support.

**Finding 2.** The challenge of designing interventions given the lack of robust analytics at the onset of the COVID-19 were likely offset by previous analytics on agri-food sector analysis, HRP and existing coordinating mechanisms at country levels. These enabled FAO country offices to: i) extrapolate combining existing data, rapid assessments with the anticipated disruptions of COVID-19; ii) make use of (incoming) real-time data, for example telephone interviews; followed by iii) first socio-economic assessments; iv) joint analysis with national and international partners; and v) the valorisation with the beneficiaries through community consultations. Hence, the updates and further consultations contributed towards a more rigorous assessment. At the onset of COVID-19, the data may not be rigorous for publications but are highly likely good enough to inform the design of the short-term interventions.

35. FAO and partners showed agility in collating and acting on what was feasible for the best available data and information as the pandemic unfolded. Such agility, coupled with experience and presence in the various regions in-country enabled a sensible rapid assessment at the onset of the pandemic. The FAO country offices and partners were aware of the limitations of each stage of the assessments and progressively verified their assessments when feasible. For instance, they pointed out the limitations of telephone interviews, whereby those with access to the telephone

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<sup>8</sup> Sorghum, cowpeas, maize, groundnuts, sesame, beans and rice.

<sup>9</sup> Okra, tomatoes and onions.

<sup>10</sup> Between 2013 and 2018 over 20 000 tonnes of seed of various crops (maize, sorghum, cowpea, sesame and groundnut) were distributed by FAO alone (FAO, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> "In the longer-term, aid, especially repeated aid, generates farmer dependency, undermines formal and private sector seed enterprise, and compromises local market" (Sperling, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> For example, FAO's Food and Nutrition Security Resilience Programme (FNS-REPRO).

were likely not the most vulnerable and, furthermore, sensitive information may not likely be shared through the telephone. FAO Afghanistan, for example, reported the relatively low sampling of female farmers, reflecting difficulties to reach women by phone.

## 2.2 Coherence

### How did FAO ensure external coherence in its COVID-19 humanitarian response?

**Finding 3.** The external coherence of FAO's COVID-19 humanitarian response was informed and facilitated by following the Grand Bargain agreement (IASC, 2016), that is, through the coordination and/or joint work with the following: i) the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); ii) Ministries, primarily for food and agriculture; iii) WHO; and iv) local level coordination with community leaders, local governments and civil society organizations. Through OCHA, there is an already functioning coordinating mechanism, such as the Humanitarian Country Team (HRT) composed of global and national partners (governments, civil society organizations), with their joint Humanitarian Response Plan. In addition, FAO co-chairs a Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC). The unpredictability and complexity of COVID-19 in the context of protracted crisis further underpinned the "not optional" necessity of coherence and coordination, especially at country levels. Despite some trade-off, the coordination provided a shared understanding of the developing crisis, including the most pressing humanitarian need and the estimated number of people who need assistance. The consolidation and updates of data helped inform the joint strategic planning, at a time of greater uncertainty and stress.

36. The HRT and/or FSAC conducted joint analysis and coordinated COVID-19 response plans with the respective country governments. Although joint analysis and planning have yet to translate into an ambition for an integrated country level humanitarian, development and peace nexus approach, the coordination helped leverage FAO's, and those of other agencies' expertise to respond to an unforeseen crisis such as COVID-19. The coordination involved: i) assessments; ii) targeting and mapping of the beneficiaries; iii) interventions; iv) guidance and advocacy for prevention of the transmission of infection; v) data management for more efficient information sharing and joint monitoring; vi) shared procedures such as technical specification for the procurement of animal feeds and cash transfers modalities.
37. For all the four countries, the rapid and follow-up assessments on the anticipated and real-time impact of COVID-19 on agri-food systems were, for the first time, jointly conducted by FAO with, for example, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) with enumerators from government and non-government organizations; covering rural and urban households. Key informant interviews also covered government agencies and development organizations. The assessments covered macro-economic impact related to trade, remittances, currency shocks, market and labour disruptions. The assessment covered current agricultural season gains or losses, as well as anticipated situation for the next agricultural season. The assessment included human health context such as the seasonality of malaria, for example. In addition, the aggravation of tensions and conflict resulting from transhumance pastoral livelihoods, among others. The assessment looked at the combined consequences on food production and consumption patterns, coping mechanisms and market functionality, as well as effects on the most vulnerable groups.
38. There are trade-offs in coordination, including time and resource allocation, instances of delays in implementation and competition in resource mobilization. Many of the partners think that the trade-off could be better managed next time. More importantly, the trade-off was also offset by added efficiencies through joint procurements, implementation and monitoring. The coordination is essential for the increasingly compounded crisis and the increasing demand to work on the humanitarian and development nexus in the context of peace.

**Finding 4.** Given the major significance of agriculture in the four focus countries, FAO country offices as a specialized UN agency, were appreciated by the partners and donors for the technical support for safeguarding agricultural livelihoods. Whilst FAO capacities differ by country, the FAO country offices leveraged their food and agriculture technical expertise and their track record in complex emergency context. Especially at well-staffed and well-resourced country offices, FAO's operational presence within various regions of the country, country level partnerships and local networks enabled an improvement towards a coherent COVID-19 humanitarian response.

39. In all four countries, the partnerships amongst FAO, WFP, governments and civil society organizations enabled an effective combination of humanitarian assistance, community sensitization and resilience-oriented agricultural livelihoods assistance. In South Sudan for example, the vegetable home gardening reached over 35 000 urban households, and resulted in: 7 percent increase of area of land cultivated with vegetable seed for consumption and marketing; 54 percent increase in the quantity of vegetables consumed by beneficiaries; 39 percent increase in the quantity of vegetable sold by beneficiaries; and 25 percent increase in average monthly income by market-oriented beneficiaries (FAO, 2020b). The project enabled social distancing, short turnover, whilst providing nutritious food for consumption and/or extra cash targeting women and youth. In Afghanistan, the coordination with health sector (WHO, UNFPA) on health response combined with tangible agricultural livelihood assistance generated greater interest from beneficiaries. In Burkina Faso, FAO supported 1 000 vulnerable smallholders through unconditional cash and distribution of inputs such as animal feed, poultry, cages and other equipment.
40. The leveraging of inter-agency expertise was demonstrated in the Socio-economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 and Related Factors in Syria conducted by the UN Country Team (see Appendix 3).

## 2.3 Inclusiveness

**How did the COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) ensure that the principle of "Leave no one behind" (LNOB) was followed to meet the needs of the vulnerable and marginalized peoples (women, minorities and marginalized groups [migrants, refugees, internally displaced people, etc.]?)**

**Finding 5.** In the context of uncertainty and restrictions in mobility, the FAO country offices had to balance the need to identify, assess and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable and hard to reach population, in a timely manner within the fragilities of a protracted crisis. To ensure the application of the principle of "Leave no one behind" in the targeting, FAO considered the combination of three layers of targeting: i) vulnerability of the area; ii) targeting vulnerable peoples (e.g. women, youth, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, internally displaced people, people with disabilities) within the area; and iii) identifying the specific households most vulnerable to the crisis. The COVID-19 impact included the emergence of new groups of vulnerable people including urban market-dependent households. They were considered at risk due to very high market dependency on food sources and supplies; residing in densely populated neighbourhoods where COVID-19 spread, and transmission is anticipated; and with reduced income due to disruption in remittances and labour.

41. In the four focus countries, the impact of COVID-19 included the joint vulnerability assessments and corresponding needs of the most vulnerable categorized into: i) households directly affected by COVID-19, including: urban poor, farmers, fisherfolk, livestock keepers and self-employed workers; ii) households indirectly affected by COVID-19, including: laid-off agricultural labourers; iii) households with IPC 3+ status pre-COVID-19; iv) means-tested household's ownership of, and access to, productive assets; and v) female-headed households, the disabled, and children and

youth, internally displaced people, households who do not have a reliable source of income or lost assets and livelihood due to conflict.

42. Interim measures were put in place for beneficiary identification, counting and registration to facilitate FAO's contributions to the GHRP. This was conducted often jointly with other UN agencies. Most agencies found the interim measures workable though there were inefficiencies. This underscores the need for coherent guidelines for beneficiary registration and counting procedures.
43. When asked about the impact of COVID-19, a number of vulnerable people tend to make little distinction between the impact of COVID-19 with other shocks as they were simultaneously being affected by many issues. They reportedly associated the exacerbation of their vulnerabilities with the deterioration of their coping strategies. In this regard, an understanding of multiple interconnected risks was essential. FAO's response to COVID-19 was integrated with other response to other crises. In the Syrian Arab Republic for example, they also undertook the light rehabilitation of irrigation systems and other infrastructures, which were damaged by war and/or punitive sanctions.

**Finding 6.** The principle of Leave no one behind was also enhanced through collaboration at inter-agency and national levels; as well as through localization. These collaborations enabled the joint identification and registration of beneficiaries. The mapping of areas and beneficiaries at country level enabled various agencies to have an overview that facilitated prioritization, avoidance of duplication and ensuring that the most vulnerable are reached. The joint Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) is a promising mechanism of monitoring and addressing accountability to the beneficiaries. In addition, the sharing of gender analysis and a common mechanism to monitor gender-based violence together with the beneficiaries are likewise promising.

44. Another very important coordination is the active involvement of the local community committees (include local leaders, farmers representatives, agriculture extension) with whom vulnerability assessments and selection criteria are discussed. The selection is done through the local community committee in coordination with the local partners and the FAO field office to make sure that the criteria is well applied to the selection process. In cases where the coordination of the registration of beneficiaries were not observed, a partner pointed out that this resulted in an extra burden for the communities as they had to register twice.
45. In addition to the vulnerability assessments and design of interventions, gender analysis was jointly conducted with the aim of addressing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities, particularly of gender-based violence, as domestic violence was generally assessed to have worsened with COVID-19 pandemics. Gender-based violence is covered in part of trainings curriculum. However, it remains a challenging issue to monitor.
46. Accountability to Affected Populations committees were formed and trained to support project implementation, improve communication between beneficiaries and project implementers and address beneficiaries' grievances during project implementation. In South Sudan for example, 67 AAP committees were formed across the project target sites. Each AAP committee consisted of members from the target communities, including chiefs, youth representatives, women representatives and religious leaders.
47. FAO and its implementing partners created awareness and sensitized beneficiaries on safety and avoiding the risks of COVID-19 transmissions. Information was disseminated via communication channels such as public service announcements (PSAs), radio talk shows and text messages in project areas. In Afghanistan for example, particularly women in rural areas and amongst the Kuchi

pastoralist, the most marginalized ethnic group, had very limited access to information, including about COVID-19. In response, FAO and partners provided on-site awareness raising sessions to migratory herders, making sure to include women, and the distribution of Kuchi-specific hygiene kits (PPE, soap, and sanitizers) along seasonal transhumance routes. In South Sudan, the pastoralist livelihood and education field schools (PLEFS) and the Agropastoral Field Schools (CEAP) in Burkina Faso included awareness raising and safety measures for COVID-19. Further reach out was done through posters, radio and television programmes. In Burkina Faso, volunteers were recruited for large-scale sensitization, for example in markets and slaughterhouses.

48. The FAO country offices made use of guidelines and information materials produced by FAO headquarters, for example to inform partners. However, they found WHO materials more accessible for the beneficiaries given the translation - e.g. in Arabic for the Syrian Arab Republic and Pashto and Dari for Afghanistan. The WHO informative posters with information on COVID-19 were available at distribution sites to raise awareness among communities.

**Finding 7.** As standard operations, FAO carried out a i) post-distribution monitoring (PDM) or seasonal outcome monitoring to assess beneficiary satisfaction with distribution arrangements (timing, location and mobilization), input preferences, use of inputs and area planted for future improvement of similar projects. In addition, ii) process monitoring was conducted to assess progress made on implementing all components of the project and improve project implementation. In addition, FAO routinely collates lessons learned that are often based on experiences working with the most vulnerable. Whilst all these are good practice, resilience outcomes from a systems perspective have yet to be conducted systematically (see Finding 1).

49. According to FAO personnel, the Organization collates lessons learned not only as part of compliance but also driven by the desire to learn and improve. The lessons learned are on the cognitive domain (i.e. knowledge, technical skills) and less on affective domain of learning (i.e. attitude, behaviour interpersonal skills). For COVID-19, there are very good documentation and dynamic sharing of lessons learned, for example through webinars. Lessons learned are compiled in the Knowledge Sharing Platform on Resilience (KORE) (FAO, 2021c; 2021d; 2021e; 2021f). KORE provides support in knowledge management with a coherent method from knowledge identification, generation, sharing and uptake.

## 2.4 Timeliness

### How did FAO ensure that humanitarian interventions were timely?

**Finding 8.** FAO's humanitarian responses were generally made timely through: i) the high level management steer and coordination particularly amongst FAO departments and at regional, subregional and country offices; ii) FAO's existing humanitarian expertise, strategy and operational structure; iii) combining pre-existing and newly gathered data and information to extrapolate, anticipate and mitigate possible disruptions to access to food and the food supply chain; iv) use of its track record with donors to mobilize funds; and v) use of its national and local networks to jointly select and service the beneficiaries. However, country offices and partners consistently expressed that even in emergencies and surge capacity, FAO need to further simplify procedures to avoid the delays and stresses for time-critical and season-sensitive procurement and provision of inputs to smallholder agricultural/herder households.

50. The high-level senior management acted swiftly and reached across departments, regions and countries to gather and steer FAO's awareness raising, knowledge generation and the formulation of the COVID-19 umbrella programme. This decisive response enabled FAO to position its agri-food expertise and frame the COVID-19 narrative not just as a health crisis but also a food crisis. The timely creation of the umbrella programme was primarily for the needed resource

mobilization. The trade-off to timeliness includes the lack of theory of change and results framework.

51. Although the magnitude of COVID-19 crisis was not predicted, the FAO Office of Emergencies and Resilience (OER) at headquarters, the regional, subregional and country offices provided the existing humanitarian expertise, strategy and operational structure. FAO's timeliness and delivery would have been impossible without a functional and ready to roll out humanitarian structure.
52. Consistently expressed by countries and partners is the need to further adapt, simplify and delegate authority for FAO's administrative requirements for emergency and surge capacity, particularly at country operation. For example, the lack of decentralized authority resulted in the delays of time-critical procurement. Even when a country office has the capacity to process Letter of Agreement (LOA) for procurement, the delegation of authority was not sufficient. In the case of Level 3 emergency, the budget ceiling was still above the designated level of decision power of the country office. This required headquarters processing at the expense of huge delays. The standard level of delegation of authority lacked consideration and adaptation to factors such as portfolio size in the country, trend of operation, etc.
53. During the COVID-19 pandemic, new requirements emerged such as PPE for market stakeholders. However, the countries found the technical specification for PPE as unclear; furthermore, it was not clear which unit is responsible for what clearance. These operational aspects caused unnecessary delays and stress to already overstretched personnel. In such pandemic, certain procedural changes would have helped.

**Finding 9.** For the entire umbrella programme FAO mobilized considerable resources amounting to USD 209 million. The humanitarian response (PA1) received the largest contribution at 45 percent of the fund; whilst PA 5 (Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery) received the second largest contribution at about 29 percent. Africa was the largest funded region at nearly 40 percent; whilst Afghanistan was the largest funded country at 9 percent (FAO, 2021a).

54. The resource mobilization was facilitated by the technical support from FAO headquarters, particularly the Office of Emergencies and Resilience; assisting in the formulation of concepts notes and quality control. However, for Afghanistan and South Sudan, the funds were raised at country levels. According to the country offices and donors, the success in funding were facilitated by a combination of: i) donor country priorities; ii) quality of the proposal based on reliable analytics; iii) partnership arrangements for joint implementation; iv) presence in various regions of the country; v) track record for reliable operations and results delivery; vi) FAO's expertise and track record in agri-food systems; vii) engagement of local actors that respond to their vulnerabilities and strengthens their agency; and viii) expectations for humanitarian action to transform towards the resilience of agri-food systems.
55. Important feedback from donors is the need to link data for action with data and narrative, to show actual results and resilience outcomes at systems levels. The donors stressed that they fund WFP for the humanitarian component in tandem with FAO for the resilience of agri-food systems. The design of the programme did not articulate an integrated "rolling menu of options" with updates of real-time results that informed related actionable and fundable interventions as the pandemic unfolded and the interventions were progressing. This could have enabled various departments of governments to provide additional contributions; also bearing in mind that the fiscal year of the donor's budget allocations do not necessarily follow the life cycle of the virus and the ensuing pandemic.

56. The country offices noted the importance of a convincing narrative on the needs and the related results of the interventions. However, their extensive country reports tend to diminish significantly once these have been aggregated into a global report at headquarters. The countries feel that whilst an aggregated report has its own value, this is also a missed opportunity for profiling the achievements of the countries.

## 2.5 Business continuity

### **How was the COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) affected by FAO's business continuity practices in the context of the unfolding COVID-19 crisis?**

**Finding 10.** Unlike other crises, the COVID-19 pandemic also affected FAO's own operations and well-being of personnel, at all levels from headquarters to country offices. Some country offices reported high rates of infection amongst personnel and families. Despite such challenges, FAO senior management at all levels managed a good business continuity that addressed staff safety and well-being; continuing core functions for ICT support for remote working; and implementation of priority programmes such as the GHRP. In many countries, their humanitarian operations continued. However, responding to a crisis whilst being affected by the crisis have had its toll on work overload and stress.

57. A business continuity plan, with guidelines on developing, implementing and monitoring were developed and tested in real-time for all levels of FAO offices and operations. For example, FAO South Sudan developed a business continuity plan (BCP) that ensured building adequate capabilities and continuity of critical business processes, functions and operations in the midst of the pandemic. The plan was centred around security, information sharing and readiness plans that included personnel well-being and support as well as projects and programme continuity. A plan was also developed and implemented for the gradual return to office, ensuring the safety and security of personnel.
58. The vaccination programme followed UN system and those of respective government host. The vaccination has had a slow start largely due to supply shortages. However, the vaccination was eventually implemented at all levels on voluntary basis. There were some examples of distress and tensions. Distress were reported when miscommunications occurred for the time and availability of vaccines at country levels There were also stresses surrounding the vaccinations of dependent children from 12 to 15 years of age, which was the policy of, for example, Italy but contradicted the policy of the UN Secretary General and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to prioritize the vaccination of the most vulnerable in developing countries.
59. At the same time, guidelines for planning were provided for the emergency livelihoods distribution and seed fairs in the context of risk of COVID-19 transmission. These guidelines are meant to provide a common approach with information applicable to all FAO personnel, implementing partners and beneficiaries. The guidelines are additional precaution to the measures/guidance shared by the relevant health authorities and partners (e.g. Ministry of Health, WHO). In the situation when FAO guidelines are conflicting with guidance shared by the relevant health authorities and partners (e.g. Ministry of Health, WHO), then the guidelines from health authorities in the country partners (e.g. Ministry of Health, WHO) are the ones to be followed. For example, in Burkina Faso, all FAO guidelines were first checked by the Ministry of Health before it went public.
60. In South Sudan, which is FAO's largest input distribution programme, despite the COVID-19-related restrictions FAO has been able to continue its ongoing provision of critical inputs to over 4 million people.

61. A few regional offices expressed that they could have had more support and could have played a bigger role in the formulation and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They felt that the lack of regional focus was a missed opportunity to synergized, for example. with inter-governmental regional bodies. Overall, many regions expressed the interest to learn more amongst each other.

**Finding 11.** Whilst FAO consistently talked about the “re-purposing” or “re-programming” of ongoing projects in response to COVID-19, technically, the RTE only found one actual example of re-purposing or re-programming. Only Afghanistan actually re-purposed a then yet to be spent fund of USD 2.7 million from a USD 19 million livelihoods programme. Following procedures of request and approval process within FAO and the donor; with corresponding formulation of a brief proposal, revised logframe and contract amendment, USD 2.7 million was re-purposed for COVID-19 humanitarian response such as materials and trainings to enhance safety and reduce transmission, emergency livelihoods packages such as vegetable/wheat cultivation support, unconditional cash transfer. The rest of the examples of FAO personnel on re-purposing/re-programming were about changing the mode of implementation such as changing from cash to electronic transfer, avoiding large crowds by phasing the number of people, etc. These changes were very sound adaptive management. However, these did not significantly change the intent, components or budget of the programme, nor did these have to involve complicated contract amendments.

62. All the four countries expressed appreciation for the technical support mechanisms at headquarters, regional and country offices, which were coordinated by OER. During chaotic and uncertain times, the support mechanisms were very important to help ensure the smooth operation and resolution of technical issues.

**Finding 12.** The “silver lining” of the “dark cloud” of COVID-19 is that it accelerated a number of necessary changes or commitments: i) the silos within FAO were diminished through the leadership commitment and core management practice to work across all departments and across offices; ii) coordination for joint planning and shared outcomes were accelerated for the humanitarian country teams; iii) localization were accelerated delegating more decision-making and implementation role for local partners and beneficiaries; iv) there were increased use of cash and voucher assistance; and v) a common system for data sharing was initiated. Whilst there is much room for improvement and whether such momentum will be sustained remains to be seen. Nevertheless, there are promising indicators.

63. The magnitude of COVID-19 was urgently felt across all aspects of the Organization. The mechanisms such as the core management team and the regular meetings with regional, subregional and country offices facilitated cooperation.
64. At global and regional levels, some people pointed out that the data collection was messy and tended to be dominated by headquarters. Some of the results could not be published due to faulty executions. They stated that this was a missed opportunity for better data collection, and the coordination and buy in with relevant regional partners. Equally important was that the discrepancies in data collection were not always addressed openly at FAO. Hence, missing out on lesson learned and correcting weaknesses. In addition, they felt that FAO's focus and the emphasis was COVID-19 as an emergency, but missed on a long-term, systems-wide perspective.
65. Localization refers to the principle and process of better engaging local and national actors in all phases of humanitarian action, including engaging the beneficiaries in decision-making and for greater support for locally-led action. The travel restrictions imposed by COVID-19 meant that international experts could not fly in and due to the risks of transmission, greater emphasis was put in localization.



### 3. Good practices and lessons learned

Please refer to paragraphs 15 and 18 for the conceptual and methodological approach used for gathering and analysing good practices and lessons learned.

<b>Case 1: Timely assessment of a major and unknown crisis when movements are restricted</b>
<p><b>1.1. Context</b></p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected, rapidly unfolding major humanitarian crisis where movements of all actors (humanitarian agencies, governments and beneficiaries) were restricted. The restrictions posed a major challenge for data gathering to inform the timely assessments, decisions, the design of interventions and mobilize resources. Furthermore, the travel restrictions are particularly worse for the hard-to-reach population.</p>
<p><b>1.2. Good practices</b></p> <p>1.2.1. Applying lessons from previous crisis, such as from the Ebola virus outbreak, showed the need to anticipate and address the continuity of the food supply chain, protecting livelihoods and mitigating gender-based violence, whilst following containment measures to prevent further transmission of the virus.</p> <p>1.2.2. The assessment phase for addressing vulnerabilities and designing mode of interventions are a standard procedure. With time and travel restrictions, using existing assessments of the geographic areas and regions in the countries; and the existing assessments of the vulnerabilities of the local people together with rapid assessments and gender analysis provided a solid starting point to extrapolate initial assessments and response.</p> <p>1.2.3. Conducting joint assessments with partners, such as with the Humanitarian Country Team, UN agencies, governments and civil society organizations enabled the pooling and leveraging of expertise, resources and networks for a wider geographic coverage, and a more timely and inter-sectoral assessment and response. This helped inform the interventions in terms of geographical targeting, household targeting, particularly women.</p> <p>1.2.4. With the complexity and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic, a systems perspective of the agri-food chain and the aggravating factors of health and peace issues were vital. Providing and linking macro-economic (trade, remittances) and micro level perspectives with the seasonal variables in health and agriculture, coupled with aggravations of tensions and conflicts, were effective in anticipating a more holistic impact of COVID-19 especially, for the most vulnerable groups.</p> <p>1.2.5. Conducting a series of assessments, baseline surveys and consultations enabled a progression towards building more robust analytics on COVID-19 and the agri-food systems.</p> <p>1.2.6. Using the analytics, FAOs expertise in food and agriculture, operational presence in various regions of the country, and track record in delivery contributed to the substantial amount of resource mobilization at the global and country levels.</p>
<p><b>1.3. Lessons learned</b></p> <p>1.3.1. When restrictions in movement impedes timely assessments, managing the trade-off between timeliness and rigour of assessments can be addressed through the temporal, spatial and institutional dimensions. As time progressed, continuously gathering and triangulating real-time data (e.g. rapid assessment and gender analysis) at macro levels and at diverse geographic locations within the country, with multiple stakeholders, including the beneficiaries, eventually achieved rich data pictures, for the adjustments or re-direction of analysis, and for a complexity-aware, decision-making and interventions.</p> <p>1.3.2. Making trade-off explicit, for example by openly acknowledging and addressing the weaknesses in the analytics enhanced the reliability and ownership of the analytics enabling the data addition and correction from multiple sources as time progressed added to the rigour of the analytics that informed the design and adjustments of the interventions.</p> <p>1.3.3. Data sharing proved vital for the joint assessment of and managing knowledge for the COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, investing in more systematic and accessible (e.g. digitized) data sharing mechanisms is vital for future crisis. This is also a good basis for sharing and using lessons learned, e.g. from responding to a health crisis that impacts of agri-food systems.</p> <p>1.3.4. Although the humanitarian component received the largest proportion of the budget, the donors funded FAO for the main expectations that FAO will use its technical expertise in food and agriculture to strengthen the agency of the most vulnerable and transition humanitarian action into resilience and development. The lack of a comprehensive narrative that demonstrates the links of “data for action” to “data that demonstrates resilience outcomes”; including a theory of change with a well-defined pathway and intervention options, including results framework, were a concern for donors and may have hindered more resource mobilization in this specific context.</p>

**Case 2: Responding to a compounding crisis within a protracted crisis****2.1. Context**

The COVID-19 pandemic is a multi-dimensional crisis that exacerbates pre-existing inequities and fragilities particularly for people living in protracted crises prior to and during the pandemic. COVID-19 is a crisis on top of acute food crisis where conflict, natural hazards-induced disasters, climate shocks and stresses, economic shocks, displacements, and chronic poverty prevail.

**2.2. Good practice**

2.2.1. FAO's two-pronged approach to maintain and secure existing critical humanitarian operations coupled with anticipatory actions for COVID-19 to safeguard livelihoods and protect the critical food supply chain, ensuring next season's production, proved relevant in a protracted crisis. The combination of the anticipatory actions for COVID-19, with other shocks (e.g. drought) and the corresponding use of GIEWS, provided for a more holistic response for people who are facing multiple stresses.

2.2.2. Whilst the COVID-19 GHRP was designed as a standalone global programme, the integration of the GHRP to the specific country's HRP of the Humanitarian Country Team and/or the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster enabled the joint planning and alignment of strategic interventions to leverage synergies and complementarities. Specifically for the project locations, the coordination of work ensured identification of gaps, avoidance of duplication and optimizing the sequencing of interventions.

2.2.3. A decisive factor for the business continuity were the technical support mechanisms at headquarters, regional and country offices, which were coordinated by the Office of Emergencies and Resilience (OER), to ensure smooth operation and resolution of technical issues.

**2.3. Lessons learned**

2.3.1. When asked about the impact of COVID-19, a number of vulnerable people tend to make little distinction between the impact of COVID-19 with other shocks as they were simultaneously being affected by many issues. They reportedly associated the exacerbation of their vulnerabilities with the deterioration of their coping strategies. In this regard, an understanding of multiple interconnected risks would be essential for a comprehensive approach for COVID-19 and future stressors; which needs the perspective of compounding shocks and people's vulnerability to protracted crises. Given these complexities, they need to be assessed and planned at inter-agency, inter-sectoral teams at country level and need to be location specific.

2.3.2. In a world with increasingly unpredictable and complex crisis such as COVID-19, having a functional, ready-for-action humanitarian expertise, strategy and multi-level operational structure, including presence in various regions of the country, is a prerequisite for a meaningful and timely anticipatory response.

2.3.3. In a world with increasingly unpredictable and complex crisis such as COVID-19, FAO's niche as a specialized humanitarian and agri-food technical expert can be further leveraged by strategizing to strengthen the links and demonstratable outcomes of the combination of humanitarian assistance with the long-term resilience of agri-food systems.

2.3.4. Whilst it is important to secure next agricultural seasons' availability of, e.g., seeds, it is equally important that seeds aid dependency is addressed through investments in long-term seed sector development and in supporting farmer seeds systems. Ongoing humanitarian assistance needs to go hand in hand with systematically addressing the underlying structural drivers of seeds insecurity in the context of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

2.3.5. The increasing magnitude of compounding crisis such as COVID-19 underlined the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach through the lens of the humanitarian and development nexus in the context of peace. The multi-stakeholder collaboration and coordination at global, regional, nation and local levels are important. A strategic and comprehensive approach would be more effective and sustainable, not only for joint planning and implementation, but also for joint outcomes.

<p><b>Case 3: Reaching out and responding to the needs of the most vulnerable</b></p>
<p><b>3.1. Context</b>                      COVID-19 exacerbated vulnerabilities, including the deterioration of people’s productive assets and their coping strategies. The principle of “Leave no one behind” becomes even more important and, at the same time, more challenging to implement.</p>
<p><b>3.2. Good practice</b></p> <p>3.2.1. Strengthening the agency of local communities by: i) involving them in and discussing results of vulnerability assessments; ii) planning for interventions; iii) setting criteria and selections of beneficiaries; iv) monitoring and assessing processing and results; not only enhanced the rigour of assessments and intervention efficiency but also contributed to joint ownership and improved outcome delivery.</p> <p>3.2.2. Innovations in re-designing interventions for COVID-19 were facilitated by addressing both the context risks and the risk of the actual humanitarian response. These were done through mapping out the possible: i) population movements due to forced displacement, spontaneous returns, and seasonal and cultural migration; ii) points of disruption of the food supply chain due to restrictions posed by COVID-19; iii) vulnerable points in the food supply chain where actors are exposed to possible virus transmission; along-side; iv) guidelines for avoiding risk of transmission for the livelihoods distribution of humanitarian aid; and particularly v) assessing and addressing points where beneficiaries can be put at risks (e.g. risk of gender-based violence during cash distribution).</p> <p>3.2.3. Communication and sensitization about COVID-19 and avoiding the risks of transmissions were made effective through: i) adaptation in local languages; ii) coherence in messaging though coordination with health sector and government; iii) use of mixed media such as radio, television, posters, mobile cars with loud speakers in public places such as local markets; iv) mobilizing local communities and beneficiaries though volunteering and in the farmer field schools; v) specific targeting of women, indigenous peoples and pastoralist, who tend to have limited access to information; vi) providing hotlines where vulnerable people can ask for help, provide feedback and make complaints.</p> <p>3.2.4. Inter-agency collaboration and the formation of the joint Accountability to Affected Populations is a promising mechanism of monitoring and addressing accountability to the beneficiaries. The AAP enables a common mechanism to monitor gender-based violence together with the beneficiaries.</p> <p><b>3.3. Lessons learned</b></p> <p>3.3.1. In order to reach and respond to the most vulnerable, a systematic understanding of their points of vulnerabilities and adjusting the mode of interventions so as not to risk the spread of infection and further aggravate vulnerabilities proved highly effective. The corresponding information and awareness raising need to be in the local language and/or dialect using multiple media.</p> <p>3. Immediate market base interventions such as CASH vouchers support local people to make their own decisions and act accordingly. However, strengthening peoples’ agency could be more effective and sustainable if integrated in holistic and long-term approaches that support financial inclusion, people’s autonomy and ownership, social mobilization and governance, and transformation of gender relations.</p> <p>3.3.2. Where possible, rely on national and local first responders. Localization leverages the specific understanding of the circumstances, proximity to the beneficiaries including hard to reach areas due to conflict; and is cost-effective.</p> <p>3.3.3. Mechanisms such as AAP are needed to provide the needed safe spaces and mechanisms for communicating, monitoring and addressing sensitive issues. Such a mechanism needs decentralized structures with community involvement and with discreteness and accountability in place.</p>

<p><b>Case 4: Responding to a crisis whilst in crisis</b></p>
<p><b>4.1. Context</b>                  Unlike other crises, the COVID-19 pandemic also affected FAO's own operations and well-being of personnel, at all levels from headquarters to country offices. Restrictions in movement meant shutting down of offices or minimum personnel presence in the office, restrictions in travel, and heavy workloads in response to the pandemic; whilst dealing with the unknown and the unpredictability of COVID-19 especially at the onset of the crisis.</p>
<p><b>4.2. Good practice</b>                  4.2.1. The formulation of a business continuity plan, which focuses on both health and safety of personnel and continuing of key operations; with ICT support and guidelines for operation for FAO personnel and partners, were applied across FAO from headquarters to country offices. The monitoring and support for the implementation of the business continuity plan were especially crucial at the regional, subregional and country offices.                  4.2.2. The decisive response from high-level senior management swiftly reaching and steering across departments, regions and countries enabled the establishment of a core management team, the formulation of FAO's COVID-19 umbrella programme and resource mobilization, and diminished silos within FAO.</p>
<p><b>4.3 Lessons learned</b>                  4.3.1. Leadership commitment and action are important in breaking silos and mobilizing expertise across FAO, enabling the Organization to respond to a crisis that also affected its own operations and personnel.                  4.3.2 Given that surge capacity can be impeded by travel restriction, FAO's decentralized operation could have been better optimized since they are at the forefront of the crisis. Further efficiency in administrative processes and programming, tailored to the scale of operations, could have been enhanced by enabling greater decision-making at regional, subregional and country offices.</p>

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## Appendix 1. People interviewed

### Headquarters

Surname	Name	Position	Division
Ahmed	Shukri	Deputy Director	Office of Emergency and Resilience
Battisti	Federica	Emergency and Rehabilitation Officer Senior Emergency and Rehabilitation Officer	Office of Emergency and Resilience
Cafiero	Carlo	Senior Statistician and Economist	Statistics Division (ESS)
Calef	David	Cash Transfer programming Consultant	Office of Emergency and Resilience
Duvachat	Etienne	Expert on Resilience Sahel for food security, nutrition and agriculture	Office of Emergency and Resilience
Jacqueson	Patrick	Senior Programme Officer	Office of Emergency and Resilience
Koloffon	Rebecca	Operations Officer	Office of Emergency and Resilience
Matras	Frederique	Information and Knowledge Management Officer	Office of Emergency and Resilience
Mcguire	Shawn	Agricultural Officer	Plant Production and Protection Division
Moncad	Emmanuel a	Emergency and Rehabilitation Officer	Office of Emergency and Resilience
Spano	Federico	Social Protection Consultant	Social Policies and Rural Institutions (ESP)
Vos	Rob	International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)	Director Markets, Trade and Institutions (MTID)

### FAO Country Offices

Country	Surname	Name	Position
Afghanistan	Kaustubh	Devale	International Disaster Risk Management and Resilience Expert
	Moeen-uddin	Siraj	Operations Officer
Syria	Abouassaf	Haya	Assistant FAOR
	Shaban	DiaaEddin	Programme Analyst
	Zvizvai	Jameson	FAO Coordinator of the Food Security Sector
Burkina Faso	Kouakou	Koffy	Emergency and Resilience Officer
	Bamba	Kassoum	Programme Associate
	Diakite	Adama	Quality Programme and Data Manager
	Diallo	Aminata	Communication/Resource Mobilization Officer
	Ouedrahogo	Ibrahim	Programme Assistant
	Tabsoaba	Alizeta	Communication Officer
	Tamboura	Mamoudou	Emergency Officer
Traore	Diane	Evaluation Officer	
South Sudan	Dzvurumi	Felix	Programme Officer
	Kapinga	Natali	Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist
	Kerandi	Nicholas	Technical Adviser
	Omolo	Danvers	MEAL Specialist

Country	Surname	Name	Position
	Prasula	Paulina	Emergency and Resilience Officer

### FAO Subregional Offices

Surname	Name	Position	Division
Abdoulayi	Sara	Social Protection Officer	FAO RAF
Abulfotuh	Dalia	Agriculture Officer	FAO RNE
Ferrand	Cyril	Senior Agricultural Officer	FAO Kenya
Nampanya	Sonevilay	Livestock Development Officer	FAO RAP
Pham	HangThiThanh	Senior Resilience Officer	FAO RAP
Sobey	Andrew	Liaison and Operations Officer	FAO RAP

### External stakeholders

Country	Surname	Name	Position	Organizations	
Syria	Manome	Minako	Coordinator of the SEIA	UNDP	
Burkina Faso	Bright	Rosie	Social Protection Advisor	WFP	
	Harouna	Dirba	DRAAH Elevage	Directeur de la direction des ressources animale	
	Kadidia Dao		Directrice DRAAH <sup>13</sup> agriculture	DRAAH Agriculture	
	Seba	Goumou	DRAAH Elevage	Coordinateur du partenariat sur le terrain	
South Sudan	Kamatsu	Shiho		World Food Programme Organization	
	Modi	Alex	FSL focal person	Caritas	
HQ	Petschen	Majda	Counsellor, AGCD; Secretary, Committee on Agriculture	World Trade Organization	
Global/Donor	Apostolopoulos	Andrew	Humanitarian Assistance Associate	USAID	
	English	Alicia	Policy Officer		
	Jost	Christine	Senior Livestock Technical Advisor		
	Rashid	Adam	Senior M&E expert		
	Sellers	Mark	Data Analyst		
	Snow	Michel	Policy Partnership Officer		
		Van Abel	Nicole	Water Resources Management	Canada
		Klassen	Jared	Program Officer, Multilateral Partnerships in Agriculture and Food	
		Maillet	Jenelle	Junior Development Officer	
		Okazoe	Naohito	Alternate Permanent Representative of Japan to FAO	Japan
	Gautam	Madhur	Lead Economist with the Agriculture Global Practice	World Bank	

The evaluation team also met several hundred FAO personnel in global and regional meetings organized to present the preliminary findings of the COVID-19 RTE.

<sup>13</sup> Direction Régionale de l'Agriculture et des Aménagements Hydrauliques - Hauts Bassins



## Appendix 2. Typology of GHRP interventions

Priority Area	Description	Interventions	Specific innovations
1. Rolling out data collection and analysis	Collecting data, information and analysis on the actual and potential impacts of COVID-19 on agri-food systems and food security in countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Use of existing data sets on area and vulnerability assessments</li> <li>* Rapid assessments</li> <li>* Surveys</li> <li>* Gender analysis</li> <li>* Local and Community consultations</li> <li>* Use of GIEWs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Remote data collection (e.g. telephone interviews)</li> <li>* Updates of information as time progresses</li> </ul>
2. Ensuring availability of and stabilizing access to food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Continuing and scaling-up (as needed) distributions of agricultural inputs (seeds, tools, livestock feed) and provision of animal health support to ensure continuous food production and income generation in the most vulnerable areas</li> <li>* Supporting livelihood diversification and home-based food production (e.g. backyard gardens) to ensure further fresh food availability (e.g. distribution of small stock, distribution of tools and seeds for home gardening,) and income</li> <li>* Reducing post-harvest losses for small-scale producers, which are likely to substantially increase due to limitations in storage facilities, transport and access to markets, through improved storage capacities and enhanced opportunities for small-scale processing and conservation of fruits, vegetables, milk and meat products, etc</li> <li>* Light rehabilitation of infrastructure (e.g. irrigation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Social protection such as Cash Plus (combining unconditional cash transfers with agricultural livelihoods inputs, assets, training and services)</li> <li>* Mobile payment systems for cash-based interventions</li> <li>* Direct seed distribution of field crops and vegetables</li> <li>* Cash and Voucher Assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The modality from conditional to unconditional to give greater flexibility to the beneficiaries; and *the delivery mechanism, e.g. from cash to electronic transfer when connecting facilities and the required conditions (systems, procedures, staff) are available</li> </ul>
3. Ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Maintain and support the continuous functioning of local food markets, value chains and systems focusing on vulnerable smallholder farmers and food workers as well as areas which are critical to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Working with agriculture products/inputs-related market managers, local officials and related stakeholders to ensure uninterrupted and COVID-safe functioning of these markets.</li> </ul>	

Priority Area	Description	Interventions	Specific innovations
	<p>the food supply for vulnerable urban areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Advocating for key food item corridors to remain open as much as possible while safeguarding the health of farmers and food workers across the whole value chain</li> <li>* Supporting food processing, transport, marketing, storing with specific focus on vulnerable smallholder farmers and food workers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Providing transport vouchers and facilitating commercial relationships</li> </ul>	
<p>4. Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Mass communication campaigns to inform at-risk or affected populations have been shown to play a critical role in efforts to reduce the spread of disease</li> <li>* Development of specific checklists/guidelines on COVID-19 safe functioning of markets, sensitization and training of market managers on these coupled with distribution of disinfectants, hygiene kits and PPEs for market stakeholders (loaders, cleaners, traders, vendors, customers, etc.)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Mapping points of vulnerabilities of the food supply chain</li> <li>* Mapping points of vulnerabilities of the interventions</li> <li>* Communication and sensitization about COVID-19 and avoiding the risks of transmissions were made effective through: i) adaptation in local languages; ii) coherence in messaging though coordination with health sector and government; iii) use of mixed media such as radio, television, posters, mobile cars with loud speakers in public places such as local markets; iv) mobilizing local communities and beneficiaries though volunteering and in the farmer field schools; v) specific targeting of women, indigenous peoples and pastoralists, who tend to have limited access to information; vi) providing hotlines where vulnerable people can ask for help, provide feedback and make complaints</li> </ul>

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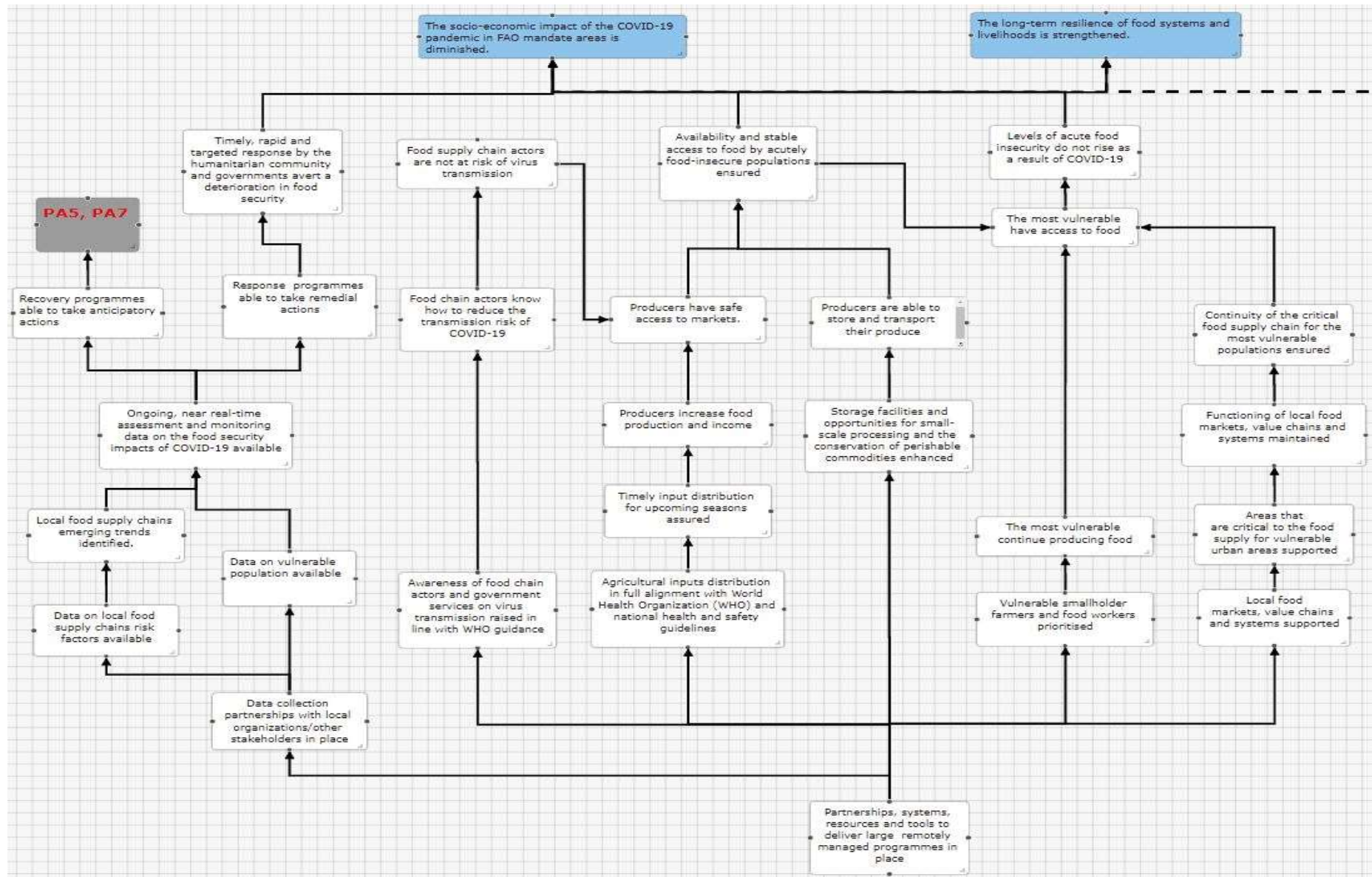
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### Appendix 3. UN agencies contribution to the Syrian socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19

UN Agencies	Contribution
UNDP	Macroeconomics, meso-level economic sectors, MSMEs and micro-level (households)
UNFPA	Gender dynamics and mainstreaming, including GBV, psychosocial impacts and health impacts in collaboration with WHO
UN HABITAT	COVID-19 matrix risk management in the Municipality of Daraa
UNICEF	Health and nutrition, education and learning, adolescent development and participation, social protection focusing on the impact on vulnerable households including households with children with severe disabilities
UNRWA	Socio-economic impacts on Palestine refugees including in health, education, livelihood and protection. Impact on critical life-saving services of UNRWA including for specific vulnerable groups
FAO	Impacts on agricultural production crops, livestock and fisheries. Impacts on livelihoods of farmers, coping and adaptive strategies. Challenges related to agricultural inputs and markets.
WFP	Food prices, food supply chains and food transporters, household food security, traders (including importers, wholesalers and retailers) and gender. Micro-level livelihoods in collaboration with UNDP including jobs, coping and adaptive strategies, assets, income/expenditure
WHO	Essential prevention for communicable diseases, including surveillance. Care of vulnerable populations and health systems. Provision of medicines and supplies to manage chronic diseases and mental health conditions.

Source: United Nation's Country Team in Syria (2020)

# Appendix 4. Theory of change: Priority Area 1 – COVID-19 Humanitarian Response and Recovery Programme



## Appendix 5. Evaluation matrix

Key question/Sub-questions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods of verification
<b>EQ1. Relevance: How did FAO ensure that its COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) was relevant to the food crisis countries?</b>			
1.1. To what extent was the COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) relevant in the context of COVID-19 as a compounding crisis within food crisis countries?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Match between COVID-19 interventions against the selected countries context analysis and COVID-19 vulnerability assessments</li> <li>- Analysis of COVID-19 intervention design in the selected countries to assess how FAO intends to assist and protect the most vulnerable in the context of a compounding crisis</li> <li>- Integration of the technical assessments on the needs, feasibilities, rationale of the interventions (e.g. seeds, livestock, cash plus)</li> <li>- Integration of the resilience component into the humanitarian interventions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Headquarters/regional, subregional, country office FAO personnel</li> <li>- COVID-19 global, subregional and country plans and reports</li> <li>- COVID-19 vulnerability and technical assessments related to interventions on food security/livelihoods/assessments</li> <li>- COVID-19 intervention profiles</li> <li>- Donor and partners perceptions</li> <li>- Aggregated and disaggregated reports, including sex-disaggregated data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Semi-structured interviews with OER personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices, PA1 and PA5 leaders, donors, partners (e.g. NGOs and women's organizations)</li> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Evaluation questionnaire for the selected countries</li> </ul>
1.2. What lessons learned and good practices can be derived from fostering the relevance of the COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) to the food crisis countries?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OER systems' reported lessons learned and good practices</li> <li>- Stakeholders' reported lessons learned and good practices, including gender-responsive good practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personnel perception</li> <li>- Global and country reports</li> <li>- OER monitoring, evaluation and learning system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Semi-structured interviews with OER/resilience personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices, PA1 and PA5 leaders, donors</li> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Evaluation questionnaire for selected countries</li> </ul>
<b>EQ2. Coherence: How did FAO ensure external coherence in its COVID 19 humanitarian response (PA1)?</b>			
2.1 To what extent did FAO's humanitarian response (PA1) complement and support global, national and local actors' (IASC partners, government and civil society organizations) efforts to address COVID-19-related humanitarian needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Added value of FAO to the GHRP</li> <li>- Adequacy of FAO's coordination with the GHRP partners on activities and mandate areas in selected countries (i.e. reference to community-based disaster risk reduction for COVID-19, reference to localization of interventions, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HQ/RO/SRO/CO FAO staff</li> <li>- Subregional, national and local COVID-19 response plan and report</li> <li>- Food Security Cluster Report</li> <li>- Governments, partners, donors</li> <li>- IASC reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Semi structured interviews with OER/resilience personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices, GHRP partners</li> <li>- Evaluation questionnaire for selected countries</li> </ul>
2.2 What are the lessons learned and good practices derived from promoting coherence of the COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) in: - Addressing the needs of the food crisis countries - Complementing and supporting global, national, and local actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OER systems' reported lessons learned and good practices</li> <li>- Stakeholders' reported lessons learned and good practices</li> <li>- Reported gender-responsive good practices and lessons learned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personnel perception</li> <li>- Global and country reports (situation and annual reports)</li> <li>- Priority areas' reconstructed theories of change</li> <li>- OER monitoring, evaluation and learning system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Semi-structured interviews with OER/resilience personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices, PA1 and PA4 leaders, donors</li> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Evaluation questionnaire for selected countries</li> </ul>

Key question/Sub-questions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods of verification
<b>EQ3. Inclusiveness: How did the COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) ensure that the principle of “Leave no one behind” was followed to meet the specific needs of the vulnerable and marginalized peoples (women, minorities, migrants, refugees, internally displaced people, etc.)?</b>			
<p>3.1. To what extent did PA1 ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access to food by the most acutely food insecure population taking into account the different needs of men and women</li> <li>- Continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most acutely food insecure population</li> <li>- Hard to reach food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extent of use of vulnerability assessments in identification of beneficiaries particularly those difficult to reach</li> <li>- Integration of the technical assessments on the needs and feasibilities, rationale of the interventions (e.g. seeds, livestock, cash plus)</li> <li>- Availability of diagnosis/description of multiple shocks people faced prior to COVID-19 and projected impact of COVID-19</li> <li>- Descriptive profiles and sex-disaggregated data of the vulnerable, direct and indirect beneficiaries</li> <li>- FAO's contribution to CERF's chronically underfunded priority areas<sup>14</sup></li> <li>- Number of people/households most vulnerable to/affected by COVID-19 who have received livelihood support (sex-disaggregated data)</li> <li>- Typology of intervention and identification of initial results</li> <li>- Examples of message uptake by vulnerable groups on the prevention of COVID-19 transmission</li> <li>- Identification of bottlenecks that hindered the achievement of the intended result</li> <li>- Examples of early contribution to results</li> <li>- Examples of gender-responsive interventions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global Report on Food Crises</li> <li>- CERF Report</li> <li>- SOFI</li> <li>- Rapid surveys and vulnerability reports</li> <li>- Technical assessments on needs and feasibility (e.g. seeds, livestock, cash plus)</li> <li>- FAO disaggregated and aggregated GHRP reports (situation reports, webinars)</li> <li>- Headquarters/regional, subregional and country office FAO personnel</li> <li>- FAO CERF reports</li> <li>- Communication plans and materials</li> <li>- Communication strategy for vulnerable and difficult to reach populations</li> <li>- Success stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Evaluation questionnaire for selected countries</li> <li>- Semi-structured Interviews with OER/resilience personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices</li> </ul>
<p>3.2 What are the lessons learned and good practices derived from promoting the “Leave no one behind” principle?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OER systems' reported lessons learned and good practices</li> <li>- Stakeholders' reported lessons learned and good practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personnel perception</li> <li>- Global and country reports</li> <li>- OER monitoring, evaluation and learning system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Semi-structured interviews with OER/resilience personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices, PA1 and PA leaders, donors</li> <li>- document review</li> <li>- Evaluation questionnaire for selected countries</li> </ul>
<b>EQ4. Timeliness: How did FAO ensure that the PA1 interventions were timely?</b>			

<sup>14</sup> (1) support for women and girls, including tackling gender-based violence, reproductive health and empowerment; (2) programmes targeting disabled people; (3) education in protracted crises; and (4) other aspects of protection.



Key question/Sub-questions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods of verification
<p>4.1 What factors facilitated or hindered the timeliness of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Needs assessments and data generated for monitoring the crisis (sex-disaggregated data)</li> <li>- Access to food</li> <li>- Continuity of the critical food supply chain</li> <li>- Food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission</li> <li>- Resource mobilization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Amount of funds at country levels, raised in comparison to target</li> <li>- Budget allocations and re-allocations</li> <li>- Rationale of resource allocation of the top five or key donors</li> <li>- Capacity for resource mobilization at subregional and country levels</li> <li>- Adapted reprioritization/reprogramming of interventions</li> <li>- Availability of resource</li> <li>- Travel restrictions</li> <li>- Duty of care measures against COVID-19 taken or not by FAO personnel and partners</li> <li>- Steps taken to reduce/diminish rate of infection amongst personnel</li> <li>- Identified risks and risk mitigation measures by personnel at headquarters and country offices</li> <li>- Internal procedures/processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Headquarters/regional, subregional and country office FAO personnel</li> <li>- Global appeal and resource mobilization plans and communications at global, subregional and country levels</li> <li>- Top five/key donors at global levels</li> <li>- FAO corporate plan for safety of personnel and partners under COVID-19</li> <li>- Business continuity plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Semi-structured Interviews</li> <li>- Evaluation questionnaire for selected countries</li> </ul>
<p>4.2 What are the lessons learned and good practices that affected timeliness of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Needs assessments and data generated for monitoring the crisis (sex-disaggregated data)</li> <li>- Access to food</li> <li>- Continuity of the critical food supply chain</li> <li>- Food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission</li> <li>- Resource mobilization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OER systems' reported lessons learned and good practices</li> <li>- Stakeholders' reported lessons learned and good practices</li> <li>- Adherence to the humanitarian and development nexus in the context of conflict</li> <li>- Risk identification and management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Headquarters/regional, subregional and country office FAO personnel</li> <li>- Personnel perception</li> <li>- Global and country reports</li> <li>- OER monitoring, evaluation and learning system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Semi-structured interviews with OER/resilience personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices, PA1 and PA4 leaders, donors</li> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Evaluation questionnaire</li> </ul>
<b>EQ5. Business Continuity: How was the COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1) affected by FAO's business continuity practices in the context of the unfolding COVID-19 crisis?</b>			
<p>5.1 To what extent was the COVID-19 humanitarian response able to adapt and/or provide flexibility (re-purposing of activities, contingency funding, expanded targeting, continuity of critical support, protection measures) to cover the risks and needs posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- FAO's concept, structures and mechanisms in place to mobilize to respond, reduce and manage multiple shocks and crises, mobilize funds so as to adjust to crises such as COVID-19</li> <li>- Support/services exchanged for resource mobilization between the FAO country, regional and subregional offices and headquarters</li> <li>- Typology of interventions and corresponding evidence used for the design</li> <li>- Comparison of decision-making (how was it before and how is it now?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rapid surveys and vulnerability reports</li> <li>- Technical assessments on needs and feasibility (e.g. seeds, livestock, Cash Plus)</li> <li>- FAO database</li> <li>- Project and priority area reports</li> <li>- Amended project (to address COVID-19)</li> <li>- FAO personnel at headquarters, regional and country offices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews with OER/resilience and budget personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices, donors</li> <li>- Evaluation questionnaire for selected countries</li> <li>- Portfolio analysis</li> </ul>

Key question/Sub-questions	Indicators	Sources of data	Methods of verification
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Criteria for re-purposing</li> <li>- Use of contingency funding</li> <li>- Level of adaptability of pre-COVID humanitarian response plan (in the selected countries) to COVID-19 humanitarian response</li> <li>- Protection measures taken to reduce risks and threats to women and men, including gender-based violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Donors</li> </ul>	
<p>5.2. How was FAO able to overcome any organizational silos to ensure coordinated planning and operations of the COVID-19 humanitarian response? (Operational issue)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual perception of organizational silos existence and the measures to overcome silos</li> <li>- Adequacy of actions implemented to break silos for the operationalization of the COVID-19 humanitarian response</li> <li>- Adequacy of criteria for resource allocation and reprioritization</li> <li>- Perception of coherence and coordination by the senior management and personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices</li> <li>- Evidence of effective coordination between headquarters, regional and country personnel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- References to silos in FAO evaluations</li> <li>- Headquarters, regional, subregional and country office FAO personnel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review of FAO evaluations from SP 5 to SDG 13</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews with OER/resilience personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices</li> <li>- Possible survey food crisis and COVID-19 country offices and headquarters, subregional and country personnel</li> </ul>
<p>5.3. What are the good business continuity practices and lessons learned that enabled the COVID-19 humanitarian response (PA1)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OER systems' reported lessons learned and good practices</li> <li>- Stakeholders' reported lessons learned and good practices</li> <li>- Analysis of measures taken for the business continuity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personnel perception</li> <li>- Global and country reports</li> <li>- OER monitoring, evaluation and learning system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Semi-structured interviews with OER/resilience personnel at headquarters, subregional and country offices, PA1 and PA5 leaders, donors</li> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Evaluation questionnaire for selected countries</li> </ul>



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