

Media Update

19 May 2020

FAO

PRESS RELEASE

Pakistan's agricultural responses to COVID-19 outbreak presented to diplomatic community at FAO headquarters in Rome

18/05/2020, Rome – The informal briefing, chaired by QU Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), brought together the Rome-based Permanent Representatives of FAO member countries. The briefing focused on FAO's humanitarian response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), and examined best practices and country examples of FAO's work to help mitigate the pandemic's damage to people's lives and livelihoods.

In Pakistan, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is spearheading action to keep the food chains running in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the policy and technical support being provided to the Ministry of National Food Security & Research and provincial governments, FAO is working with the government and other partners to help strengthen resilience by contributing to national efforts to curb the transmission of the virus.

FAO, in particular, is raising awareness amongst rural farming communities in some of the most remote areas across the country where the organization has wide networks and is running parallel campaigns, both online and at the field level, to harness broader networks.

With over 60 percent of the population residing in rural areas, the number of households who derive food and livelihoods from farming make up a significant majority of the population. Together with UN partners and the Government of Pakistan, FAO is helping fill the information gap in rural areas by taking action to ensure effective dissemination of information to those communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19.

FAO Representative in Pakistan, Minà Dowlatchahi presented Pakistan's case on how FAO is managing to continue essential operations in the face of the pandemic focusing on social messaging to farmers, pastoralists and COVID19 risk mitigation.

“FAO in Pakistan has worked closely with the government to assist their delivery of services to vulnerable people in some of the most challenging areas of the country,” said Dowlatchahi. “We will continue to do our utmost to help the people of Pakistan face down the challenges of COVID-19,” she added.

As part of its work in rural communities, FAO is raising awareness regarding the potential impacts of the virus' spread on food and agriculture, value and supply chains, food prices and food security through various means of communication to support the Government of Pakistan in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finding new ways to deliver knowledge-based facts to local communities

Various digital campaigns are being run across all provinces in Pakistan where FAO is sharing important information with different farmer groups and local communities in an effort to sensitize local communities on the measures that can help protect against COVID-19. FAO teams are conducting regular online awareness sessions with local farmers, agriculture and livestock workers and technicians to help them understand how farmers can help curtail the spread of the virus by adopting practices such as handwashing, physical distancing and other precautions.

Stepping up efforts to support vulnerable communities

The impacts of the outbreak resulted in the disruption of food supply chains, gaps in farming inputs and unemployment. FAO implementation and operations continue in the field, with the organization reaching out to farmers and those most vulnerable to these shocks. Safety of vulnerable populations, careful planning and social safeguarding measures while delivering the support remains the utmost priority.

FAO with support from Government and UN partners is also promoting greater hygiene in the field to prevent the spread of COVID-19. More than 80 000 UN and Government of Pakistan approved Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials, including posters and brochures, were

distributed amongst local communities in FAO's intervention districts. These posters with prevention guidelines in local languages have been displayed at fruit and vegetable shops, supermarkets, meat and dairy shops and other public places which were still operating.

Supporting stronger agriculture and food systems through FAO's farmer field schools

Farmer Field Schools are a major tool for transferring knowledge to rural smallholder farmers where these local farmers learn about climate resilient and more modern agricultural practices, innovation, basic entrepreneurship skills and develop their linkages with markets. FAO is redesigning the curricula of these Farmer Field Schools to educate the rural communities on the precautionary measures to combat spread of COVID-19, and safety in agricultural practices such as pesticides handling. Special topics relevant to fighting COVID-19 spread have been included in the farmer field school sessions, including on healthy diets.

Through the farmer field schools FAO has continued to raise awareness about preventive health and hygiene practices. During these activities hands-on, participatory learning was applied to demonstrate the best practices which would help these local communities protect themselves against COVID-19 infections. Practical demonstrations have helped local communities who otherwise lack access to information understand various preventive measures such as hand washing, physical distancing and other health and hygiene practices.

Over 81,000 most vulnerable people, both men and women, have been directly engaged through frontline workers to help these communities protect against COVID-19.

The latest edition of the Global Report on Food Crises has issued a clear warning. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 135 million people experienced crisis level of acute food insecurity. COVID-19 and related restrictions risk pushing many more into acute hunger. . In Pakistan, it is estimated that 21 million people were already severely food insecure before the onset of COVID-19. Preventing new or worsening food crises requires urgent action.

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UNAIDS

STATEMENT

UNAIDS urges governments to ensure that HIV service providers from community-led organizations are recognized as essential service providers in the context of COVID-19

GENEVA, 18 May 2020—A cornerstone of the response to HIV, community-led health service delivery has become even more critical in the context of COVID-19, as the needs of marginalized community members and the burden on the health sector are increasing, making it vital that continued provision of HIV, tuberculosis and other health services is secured. Community-led organizations are providing a lifeline to underserved, marginalized and hard-to-reach populations around the world.

Physical distancing restrictions have created significant challenges for those needing to access essential services, creating an increased burden on community organizations, which are at the centre of service delivery.

UNAIDS recognizes that community organizations have an unparalleled depth of experience in creating and delivering responses to health and human rights crises within their communities. The many community-led networks and groups that emerged to respond to HIV possess immense practical experience, organizational strength and unparalleled community access for facilitating the delivery of life-saving support, and for influencing people's real-life practices to better protect their health.

Community-led networks and organizations have also developed important working relationships and roles within health and community systems, including in coordination and task-shifting functions. As evidenced in many countries, these capacities can, with proper support, be deployed to facilitate the provision of COVID-19 information, prevention, testing and linkages to care. Yet without formal recognition of the essential nature of their work, they face significant barriers to continuing to provide services. It is the view of UNAIDS that it is critical to the COVID-19 response and to mitigating broader health impacts of the pandemic that community-led organizations be

supported to continue to provide essential services and have the protective equipment and safe policy environment necessary to do so.

The role of community-led organizations must be appropriately recognized and supported in the context of COVID-19. They must be factored into all aspects of planning, design and implementation of interventions to combat both COVID-19 and the efforts required to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on other health areas, including HIV and tuberculosis. In particular, and as first steps in this effort, UNAIDS urges COVID-19 crisis committees at the national and district levels to:

- Include the workforce of community-led health care services into the lists of essential service providers and treat them as equivalent to health-care providers.
- Design physical distancing restrictions and policies in ways that allow community-led services to continue operating safely. Essential services include, but are not limited to, the physical provision of HIV, tuberculosis and COVID-19 and other health services that include prevention commodities, including condoms, lubricants, clean needles and opioid substitution therapy, contraceptives, hygiene kits, test kits, medication, triage and linkage to care, adherence support, packages of food and other essentials, the provision of legal services and protection for survivors of gender-based violence and other forms of violence and discrimination. Particular attention needs to be paid to people with physical disabilities.
- Provide special authorization to relevant community-led service providers to move freely, with appropriate personal protective equipment, to deliver the services when and where needed.
- Ensure that community-led organizations, networks and groups be provided with personal protective equipment and training in order to protect themselves and their clients in the course of service delivery.
- Take urgent measures to ensure the security, and expansion, of existing funding for community-led organizations, so that those organizations can continue to provide services.
- Ensure inclusive and transparent governance of COVID-19 responses, with decision-making bodies that include representatives of community-

led organizations, including those focused on gender, equity and human rights, to ensure that COVID-19 policies are designed to support the range of service providers and activities necessary for an effective and equitable response.

UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.