

Media Update

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FAO

MEDIA ADVISORY – ATTENTION FORWARD PLANNING EDITORS

Forty-Six FAO Member Nations in Asia and the Pacific to chart a course for securing food systems and mitigating the effects of COVID-19 and climate change on agricultural sectors

13/08/2020, Bangkok/Thimphu – The arrival of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has had a great impact on agriculture and food systems in Asia and the Pacific, a region already beset by climate and weather related challenges, such as droughts and flooding.

Supply chains have been disrupted, demand has dropped for certain foods, resulting in damage to nutrition, health and livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people in this, the world's most populous region.

In response, 46 Member Nations, along with private sector and civil society organizations, will discuss a way forward during the [35th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific \(#APRC35\)](#) in virtual mode, from 1 – 4 September 2020.

The Royal Government of Bhutan is hosting and chairing the biennial event.

The stakes are high

While some parts of East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific have experienced, relatively, less of an impact, the COVID-19 contagion continues to ravage many countries in the region. In addition to the threats on life, the impact of lockdowns and restricted movements have devastated the livelihoods of millions, increased acute hunger and set back progress toward achieving the world's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG-1 and SDG-2 (ending poverty and ending malnutrition).

More than ever, innovation and increased use of existing and new technology will be needed to respond to the risks and challenges to food systems posed

by the spread of the coronavirus and the need to better manage natural resources sustainably in the face of climate change. A new approach to partnerships will also be required.

Media welcome

While participation in this FAO Regional Governing Body Session is by invitation only, [representatives of news organizations are welcome to follow the proceedings live via Webcast](#) and all conference documents are available online at the [APRC-35 Website](#)

Further information can be obtained directly by contacting the Conference Information Officer, Allan Dow, at allan.dow@fao.org #APRC35

<http://www.fao.org/asiapacific/news/detail-events/en/c/1303814/>

UNICEF/WHO

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

2 in 5 schools around the world lacked basic handwashing facilities prior to COVID-19 pandemic — UNICEF, WHO

NEW YORK/GENEVA, 13 August 2020 – As schools worldwide struggle with reopening, the latest data from the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) reveal that 43 per cent of schools around the world lacked access to basic handwashing with soap and water in 2019 – a key condition for schools to be able to operate safely in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Global school closures since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic have presented an unprecedented challenge to children’s education and wellbeing,” said Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director. “We must prioritize children’s learning. This means making sure that schools are safe to reopen – including with access to hand hygiene, clean drinking water and safe sanitation.”

According to the report, around 818 million children lack basic handwashing facilities at their schools, which puts them at increased risk of COVID-19 and other transmittable diseases. More than one third of these children (295 million) are from sub-Saharan Africa. In the least developed countries, 7 out of 10 schools lack basic handwashing facilities and half of schools lack basic sanitation and water services.

The report stresses that governments seeking to control the spread of COVID-19 must balance the need for implementation of public health measures versus the associated social and economic impacts of lockdown measures. Evidence of the negative impacts of prolonged school closures on children's safety, wellbeing and learning are well-documented, the report says.

"Access to water, sanitation and hygiene services is essential for effective infection prevention and control in all settings, including schools," said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. "It must be a major focus of government strategies for the safe reopening and operation of schools during the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic."

Other key findings from the report include:

- Of the 818 million children who lacked a basic handwashing service at their school, 355 million went to schools which had facilities with water but no soap, and 462 million to schools which had no facilities or water available for handwashing.
- In the 60 countries at highest risk of health and humanitarian crises due to COVID-19, 3 in 4 children lacked basic handwashing service at their school at the start of the outbreak; half of all children lacked basic water service; and more than half lacked basic sanitation service.
- 1 in 3 schools worldwide had either limited drinking water service or no drinking water service at all.
- 698 million children lacked basic sanitation service at their school.

The report identifies several resources necessary for COVID-19 prevention and control in schools, including 10 immediate actions and safety checklists. It builds on [guidelines on the safe reopening of schools](#) issued by UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank with practical advice for national and local authorities on how to prepare for safe school reopening and keep children safe when they return to school. The guidelines include several WASH-

related protocols on hygiene measures, use of personal protective equipment, cleaning and disinfection, as well as providing access to clean water, handwashing stations with soap, and safe toilets.

UNICEF and WHO are committed to achieving equitable access to adequate WASH services worldwide. The agencies recently launched a joint initiative, [Hand Hygiene for All](#), to support the most vulnerable communities with the means to protect their health and environment. It brings together international partners, national governments, public and private sectors, and civil society to ensure affordable products and services are available, especially in disadvantaged areas.

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About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

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About WHO

The World Health Organization directs and coordinates international health within the United Nations system. Working with its 194 Member States, WHO's mission is to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable.

For more information about WHO, visit www.who.int.

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About the Joint Monitoring Programme

The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene is responsible for monitoring global progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets and indicators relating drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The JMP produces national, regional and global estimates of progress on WASH in households, schools and health care facilities.