



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Mozambique

Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 in food crises

May 2020 – April 2021

Stemming an emergency to prevent a disaster



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Executive summary

Since early 2020, an outbreak of COVID-19 – an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus – has rapidly spread across the world, devastating lives and livelihoods. As of May 2020, the full impact of the virus on food security and agricultural food systems is not yet known, nor will it likely be, for months to come as the spread of the virus continues to evolve differently by continent and by country. What is clear is that it is already having significant negative effects on people along the food supply chain – from producers to processors, marketers, transporters and consumers. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is deeply concerned about the potential impacts of the virus and related containment efforts on food security and livelihoods, particularly in contexts of high vulnerability and where populations are already experiencing food crises, like in Mozambique.

The spread of COVID-19 represents an unprecedented shock for Mozambique, with wide-ranging health, welfare, nutrition, food security and socio-economic consequences, especially due to the expected loss of livelihoods and income streams. The potential for this to become a complex humanitarian tragedy is clear by the compounding effects of the health crisis on already highly vulnerable populations. In Mozambique, COVID-19 will affect the same communities who have barely recovered from recent major shocks such as cyclones, drought, floods and conflict, which severely affected their food security and livelihoods.

Within the framework of FAO's component in the United Nations (UN) Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan, FAO in Mozambique has assessed the potential impacts of the virus in the local context and developed a plan to maintain the provision of critical assistance where there are already high levels of need, while also meeting new needs emerging from the effects of COVID-19. Within the Plan, FAO in Mozambique's efforts will focus on the following main areas of work:

- contributing to national data and analysis on food security;
- ensuring availability of and access to food;
- ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chains; and
- ensuring actors along the food supply chain are not at risk of COVID-19 transmission.

The Plan is aligned with FAO Mozambique Country Programming Framework (CPF) and covers the period from May 2020 to April 2021 and the total budget is USD 20 million. The timeframe will allow for immediate support in the cool season and non-crop related interventions, as well as preparation and coverage of the main agricultural season. There are initial indications of geographic targeting that will be revised and adjusted as the situation evolves and additional data and analyses are available.

Crisis overview

Current situation

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, with a continuous and steep rise in the number of cases and deaths worldwide. While COVID-19 is devastating lives, public health systems, livelihoods and economies across the world, those living in food crisis contexts are particularly exposed to its effects.

In Mozambique, 1.6 million people were already estimated to be in severe acute food insecurity (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification [IPC] Phase 3 and above) in February 2020. Most live in contexts of climate change and conflict and COVID-19 could further escalate these figures, with likely rises in humanitarian needs and food insecurity as a consequence of both the pandemic itself and containment efforts.



The country is directly exposed to the effects of the pandemic on people's lives and wellbeing, aggravated by a weak and overburdened health system and high levels of malnutrition. There are also serious indirect impacts on livelihoods, through disruptions to food supply chains and access to food, basic services and humanitarian assistance.

Movement restrictions necessary to contain the spread of the virus threaten to disrupt the entire food supply chain – from production to processing, packaging, transport, marketing and consumption. This would leave already vulnerable populations facing a growing reality of even further constrained access to food due to shortages, high prices and curtailed incomes, resulting in reduced purchasing power. Labour shortages could further disrupt the food supply chain, while informal workers will be hard hit by job and income losses.

On the supply side for example, we can expect disruptions to transport and logistic challenges in moving inputs from one location to another due to restrictions and quarantine. Shortages and price spikes for certain products are already being felt in urban areas. Cross-border trade flows and procurement processes could be interrupted, and limited labour availability could disrupt agricultural cycles and the production and distribution of agricultural products.

Slowdowns or reductions in the delivery of humanitarian assistance could be catastrophic for Mozambique. The pandemic will likely have significant repercussions on humanitarian operations, particularly on budgets, as resources could be reprogrammed to support COVID-19 efforts. In terms of logistics, movement restrictions will hamper both staff and deliveries, leading to rising delivery and potentially also assistance costs. The number of people requiring humanitarian assistance could increase as a result, posing an enormous challenge in terms of the ability of government and organizations to address those needs.



480 000 ha of cereal crops destroyed by Cyclone Idai (CFSAM, 2019)



75% of the working population are employed in the agriculture sector

Food security in a humanitarian context

In countries such as Mozambique that are already affected by recurrent shocks, a COVID-19 outbreak could prove much more difficult to control and may exacerbate the current challenges faced by vulnerable populations, such as high HIV rates, food insecurity and malnutrition. Due to access constraints and the limitations of the health sector, the disease could spread rapidly and have severe impacts. Price spikes and limited access to basic necessities could lead to increased competition over limited resources and social tension.

With humanitarian costs soaring, supporting food production and related value chains during a crisis is a cost-effective means to rapidly increase and sustain food availability, while protecting the agriculture-based livelihoods on which the majority of affected people rely. Food security and livelihood interventions save lives and can strengthen resilience in the face of future crises. Investing in local food systems provides people with a means to survive even in the midst of disaster.

Impact of containment measures

Two days before confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 in Mozambique, the government instituted preventative measures including establishing a technical committee for COVID-19, suspending/cancelling visas, and closing schools and non-essential public services for 30 days starting on 23 March. It also imposed preventative measures in public and private services, limited public gatherings to no more than 50 people, reinforced mandatory 14-day quarantine for anyone entering Mozambique, and closed some border-crossing points. Those measures were further revised to gatherings of maximum 20 people, the closure of several public spaces and internal travel limited to essential only.

Such restrictions could derail agricultural input supply chains at critical periods (main season harvest and cool season planting), reduce informal labourers' access to farmland and therefore both their wages and the area cultivated, and constrain transport of goods to processing facilities and markets. Livestock supply chains

could also be hit by the pandemic, while vulnerable fishing communities could find access to markets particularly difficult. These would translate into significant income losses and purchasing power, undermining food security, nutrition and overall resilience in the face of the health emergency. The impact of price rises and consequent social effects is of serious concern for Mozambique, given the sensitivity of local markets to regional and global price movements as well as high dependency on food imports.

In parts of Mozambique that are still recovering from two cyclones and recent drought and floods, any further disruption to food production and value chains could be catastrophic. More specifically, the southern region (currently affected by drought), central region (affected by cyclone Idai last year), Cabo Delgado in the north (affected by cyclone Kenneth, floods, conflict and internal displacement) and low-income urban/peri-urban populations across the country will be disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to their pre-existing high level of stressors.

Food supply chains

COVID-19 has the potential to severely disrupt critical food supply chains, including between rural and urban areas. Movement or import/export restrictions could interrupt transport of key food items and access to processing units and markets, affecting both producers and consumers. This in turn could lead to reduced income for farmers and unstable food prices that deviate from geographical and seasonal patterns, again creating uncertainty for both producers and consumers.

Such a scenario would seriously affect the most the most susceptible, such as informal labourers, vulnerable urban/peri-urban populations, displaced people and others that rely heavily on markets to meet their needs. Reduced or lost wages, unstable prices, and limited availability of essential food items would have grave implications for food security and nutrition among these groups.

Existing vulnerabilities

These combined impacts could exacerbate the already high exposure of acutely food-insecure populations and threaten recent development gains in Mozambique. Households could resort to negative coping mechanisms that will have lasting effects on their lives and livelihoods, such as eating fewer meals, not spending money on health, education or other basic necessities, and selling productive assets. The situation is of added concern for migrants, internally displaced and refugees, who are already highly vulnerable, particularly cyclone and conflict-affected populations.

Strategic approach

FAO in Mozambique's immediate priority is to ensure the continuity of essential operations and contribute to mitigating the pandemic's impact on vulnerable people, by maintaining the provision of critical humanitarian assistance to save lives and livelihoods where there are already high levels of need, while also meeting new needs emerging from the effects of COVID-19.

FAO's target groups and geographic areas will be further refined as more information and analysis becomes available, but special consideration will be given to high-risk groups such as:

- subsistence and small-scale producers (farmers, livestock keepers and fisherfolk), particularly women;
- labourers along the rural-urban food value chain; and
- displaced populations and populations affected by natural disasters and conflict.

It is important to note that COVID-19 can amplify and intensify existing gender and other inequalities. For women, it can have economic, health, unpaid labour and gender violence consequences: there is a risk of reversing the limited achievements made in women's rights and economic empowerment in recent years. It is therefore crucial to include women and their organizations at the heart of the response to COVID-19. The country's youth must also be supported, as they are also at high risk from the potential economic and labour market fallout posed by the restrictions and health implications of the pandemic.

In consideration of the epidemiological risks linked to COVID-19, FAO is carefully reviewing operational modalities of safeguarding the delivery of critical assistance while ensuring activities are doing no harm, not contributing to the spread of the disease and keeping beneficiary communities safe.

In doing so, FAO is working in accordance with the government's preventive measures and within the overall UN approach. These take into account the decisions/recommendations by the UN Country Team on activation of business continuity plans and reduced presence of non-essential staff. This reduces the health risks presented by COVID-19 and takes into consideration the "Stay and Deliver" principle of the UN system.

Within the above framework, FAO in Mozambique will continue to carry out humanitarian and resilience-building activities to serve the most food-insecure populations. Time-sensitive assistance will ensure farmers and fisherfolk can continue critical production, while animal health interventions will safeguard livestock and cash-based interventions will be expanded where possible.

FAO is consulting with government counterparts (at national and local levels) and with implementing partners on their ability to continue delivering, adapting contractual agreements to allow flexibility in duration and scope. FAO developed Standard Operating Procedures for COVID-19, in line with government measures, which all its partners have been urged to implement. Consultations and coordination with other UN agencies continue to combine logistic channels for aid delivery and minimizing exposure of staff and beneficiaries.

Partnerships and coordination

Close, large-scale collaboration with local organizations, community groups and other actors on the ground is absolutely critical, as they are on the frontline and play a crucial role in maintaining supply lines. They will be providing assistance and passing on messages that are vital to contain the spread of COVID-19, such as the importance of physical distancing, hand washing and other hygiene practices, wherever feasible.

The COVID-19 response is an opportunity to strengthen local partnerships and FAO will continue to identify partners based on capacity/due diligence assessments, strengthening their skills and providing them with dedicated funding. Strong relationships with line Ministries as well as provincial and district authorities, local community-based organizations and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with long-established presence in the field will enable timely and effective implementation of activities. FAO will advocate for the maintenance of critical food supply chains, livelihoods support and consistent health messaging related to COVID-19.

The Global Food Security Cluster (gFSC), co-led by FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP), works directly with partners and stakeholders, and is closely monitoring the latest information on COVID-19 and its impacts on food security. This includes advocating for joint analyses, impact assessments on agricultural value chains and price monitoring. The gFSC and the FSC at national level will be calling for additional short-term food assistance to areas already affected by COVID-19, including urban and peri-urban areas and enhanced support to agricultural production and livelihoods.

FAO's COVID-19 Response Plan for Mozambique

Component 1. Contributing to national data and analysis on food security

Given the unprecedented nature of the crisis, creating a better understanding of the potential impacts of COVID-19 on food security is of paramount importance and urgency. FAO in Mozambique is contributing to data analyses to inform programming, in close collaboration with the government (through the Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition [SETSAN]) and key partners such as the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP and NGOs.

Based on the ongoing efforts by the donor community and food security actors, FAO intends to support and complement national initiatives, contributing to risk analyses and surveillance systems to capture the potential impacts of COVID-19 on agricultural production, food security and livelihoods. In this regard, FAO will continue working with partners and providing technical and financial support to national systems to produce information in a timely manner.

Table 1. Contributing to national food security data and analyses

Activity	Area
Identify population groups most at risk of food insecurity due to COVID-19	Nationwide
Identify alternative means of data collection and analysis	Nationwide
Enable a wider sharing of information and analysis	Nationwide
Develop scenarios and plan support	Nationwide
Assess potential impacts on farmers and actors along the value chain through remote data collection	Nationwide
Adapt IPC food security analyses based on a common understanding of impacts	Nationwide

Component 2. Ensuring availability of and access to food for the most food-insecure populations

Among the main expected impacts of the pandemic are potential shortages of food items, food price spikes –already reported in Maputo city – and reduced or lost incomes due to market disruptions. It is therefore critical to preserve ongoing livelihood and food production assistance and support incomes to ensure that vulnerable populations can maintain their access to food. Interventions will be combined, to the extent possible, with the national social protection programme, supported by other UN agencies and donors.

One of the immediate priorities in a COVID-19 context is to ensure that ongoing deliveries of critical humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups are not hindered and are adapted to potential COVID-19 impacts. For FAO, this means preserving and protecting the agricultural livelihoods and food security of vulnerable populations, safeguarding and promoting food production and value chain and related livelihoods systems. Building on past experience, e-voucher systems also contribute to safeguarding local markets through agrodealers while ensuring availability of agricultural and livelihood inputs.

Table 2. Ensuring availability of and access to food for the most food-insecure populations

Activity	Area
Distribute agricultural inputs (seeds for staple crops and vegetables, cassava cuttings, orange flash sweet potatoes , fertilizers, etc..) for farmers in rural areas	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia
Distribute seeds and tools for home gardening, aimed at improving nutrition in peri-urban areas	Maputo, Nampula, Zambezia
Promote nutrition and livelihood diversification through the production of small stock in rural and peri-urban areas	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia
Support animal vaccination campaigns to prevent and control diseases and safeguard food security and public health	Nationwide

Promote improved post-harvest practices to reduce losses from transport and market limitations	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia
Support regional agricultural research centres in producing seed to ensure local availability for the main agricultural season	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia
Promote local multiplication of cassava and sweet potato cuttings	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Zambezia
Assist people resettled from cyclone Idai fallout and host communities in food production (e.g. distribution of small stock and agricultural inputs)	Manica and Sofala
Improve access to water through small-scale irrigation equipment, boreholes and water harvesting techniques for farmers' groups and surrounding communities	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia

Component 3. Ensuring continuity of the food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations

The proper functioning of local food markets, value chains and the flow of agricultural products are key factors influencing food security and nutrition. In Mozambique, FAO will aim to maintain and support their continuous functioning, focusing on vulnerable smallholder farmers, food workers, and areas critical to food supply for vulnerable peri-urban areas.

Table 3. Ensuring continuity of the food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations

Activity	Area
Based on the results of Component 1, advocate for key food and agricultural corridors to remain open as much as possible, while safeguarding the health of stakeholders	Nationwide
Promote food safety through good practices along value chains to reduce agricultural, livestock and fisheries contamination	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia
Strengthen local producers' groups to maintain negotiating power and access to markets	Gaza, Manica, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia
Improve the capacity for conservation of fish and other fresh products (provide small solar cooling systems)	Gaza, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia
Test and promote vouchers to supply local fresh food (vegetables, eggs, chickens, etc.) for the most vulnerable	Manica, Maputo, Sofala, Zambezia
Collaborate with cash transfer programmes to encourage involvement of vulnerable groups in economic and agricultural activities	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia

Component 4. Ensuring actors along the food supply chain are not at risk of virus transmission

In close coordination with national authorities and WHO, it is critical to raise awareness of actors along the food supply chain on food safety and health regulations. This will be implemented mainly in collaboration with the district agricultural services, using a network of extension agents and local partners to ensure that they follow preventive measures to reduce exposure to COVID-19 transmission.

Table 4. Ensuring actors along the food supply chain are not at risk of virus transmission

Activity	Area
Conduct sensitization trainings on best practices to mitigate risk of infection, including for agriculture and veterinary staff, forestry authorities, farmers' groups, forest users, women and youth	Nationwide
Support the provision of basic preventive and sanitization equipment (gloves, masks, soap, etc.) to extension agents and field staff involved in FAO activities	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia
Deploy ICT tools (radios, cellphones, tablets, megaphones, etc.) at local level to reduce physical contact and support agricultural extension services to: i) convey awareness messages on COVID-19; ii) convey technical messages (on production, marketing, conservation, small-scale processing) and iii) feed into a robust monitoring system	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia
Encourage and maximize the use of social media for information sharing and learning among agricultural extension agents and farmers	Nationwide
Develop simple and user-friendly platforms to deliver messages to extension agents and from those to farmers, customized to specific contexts	Gaza, Manica, Nampula, Sofala, Zambezia
Customize messages to raise COVID-19 awareness through farmer field schools, livestock field schools, farmers' associations, fisheries committees and other networks	Nationwide
Develop and disseminate communication products (leaflets, posters, banners, radio spots, etc.) in local languages	Gaza, Manica, Maputo, Nampula, Zambezia

Saving livelihoods saves lives

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