

# MULTIPLE ROLES OF FARMERS' AND PRODUCERS' ORGANIZATIONS IN RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS





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## Acronyms

<b>AFA</b>	Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development
<b>AFDI</b>	Agriculteurs Français et Développement International)
<b>APESS</b>	Association pour la Promotion de l'Élevage au Sahel et en Savane)
<b>CAPAD</b>	Confédération des Associations des Producteurs Agricoles pour le Développement
<b>CNCR</b>	Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux
<b>CNOP</b>	Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes
<b>COPACO</b>	Confédération Paysanne du Congo
<b>CRUS</b>	Conseil Régional des Unions du Sahel
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organization
<b>CTA</b>	Technical Centre for Agricultural Cooperation
<b>CTOP</b>	Coordination Togolaise des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles
<b>EAFF</b>	Eastern Africa Farmers' Federation
<b>FAEC</b>	Federation of Farmer Associations Promoting Family Agricultural Enterprise in Cambodia
<b>FO</b>	farmers' organization
<b>GAFSP</b>	Global Agriculture and Food Security Program
<b>LFO</b>	local farmers' organization
<b>MAC</b>	Monitoring and Action Committee
<b>MFI</b>	microfinance institution
<b>NAMAC</b>	National Association of Mongolian Agricultural Cooperatives
<b>NFO</b>	national farmers' organization
<b>NICT</b>	new information and communication technologies
<b>OACPS</b>	Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States
<b>PAFO</b>	Pan-African Farmers' Organization
<b>PIFON</b>	Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network
<b>PROPAC</b>	Plateforme Régionale des Organisations Paysannes d'Afrique Centrale
<b>RBM</b>	Réseau Billital Marobé
<b>RFO</b>	regional farmers' organization
<b>ROFAMA</b>	Ronono Faritra Matsiatra Ambony
<b>ROPPA</b>	Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest
<b>SACAU</b>	Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions
<b>SEWA</b>	Self Employed Women's Association
<b>SOA</b>	Réseau Syndical des Organisations Agricoles
<b>TAHA</b>	Tanzania Horticultural Association
<b>TFP</b>	technical and financial partner
<b>TUNADO</b>	The Uganda National Apiculture Development Organisation
<b>UMNAGRI</b>	Union Maghrébine et Nord-Africaine des Agriculteurs
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

## Foreword

This study gathered statements from farmers' and producers' organizations (FO) on how their role evolved and changed during the COVID-19 pandemic to call attention to the new or stronger roles played by those organizations and to address capacity-building needs and strategic areas of focus for the design of future actions and programmes.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread worldwide in early 2020, giving rise to unprecedented restrictions that directly impacted the operations of agricultural systems, many FOs in developing countries were managing institutional strengthening programmes with support from IFAD, the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS). These programmes included the Asian Pacific Farmers Programme (APFP) (2018-2023/US\$48.7 million) and the Farmers' Organizations for Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Programme (FO4ACP) (2019-2023/EUR 42.7 million).

These programmes, designed by farmers' organizations (FOs) for farmers' organizations, enabled these organizations to make critical choices to adapt the programmes to an ever-changing environment to better respond to opportunities and react more quickly to crises. When the pandemic hit, FOs drew up a COVID-19 Continuity Plan for the FO4ACP programme based on consultations with all stakeholders, in order to ensure coordinated action and the efficient use of available resources for a swift response to the crisis.

In just a few months, most regional IFAD FO partners were able to quickly draft and submit proposals to the COVID-19 Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF) set up by IFAD in June 2020. This was particularly the case for AFA and the Pan-African Farmers' Organization (PAFO), which were the first regional institutions to submit such proposals. Thanks to FO4ACP's existing coordination facilities, the Support African Farmers in the 2020 Emergency (SAFE 2020) emergency project submitted by PAFO and AgriCord provided additional funding in the amount of US\$1.5 million to African FOs in response to the crisis.

That same facility (RPSF) funded three other emergency projects that directly supported FOs in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Assuring Resiliency of Family Farmers Amidst COVID 19 project (ARISE/US\$2 million), designed and implemented by AFA in Asia, is aimed at increasing the resilience of family farmers. The PASP2 (PAS2P/US\$1.5 million) project is designed to help livestock-farming families faced with the combined effects of the pastoral lean season, insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic and is implemented by Réseau Billital Maroobé (RBM) and its member FOs in the Sahel. The Pacific Islands Rural and Agriculture Stimulus project (PIRAS/US\$6.6 million) in the Pacific, cofinanced by the Australian government, is implemented by Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network (PIFON) and its members. PIFON used the modalities of the FO4ACP COVID-19 Continuity Plan to conduct much-needed studies on the impact of COVID-19 and related surveys among farmers. The results of the studies are now being put into action through the Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services (PIRAS) project.

The multiple responses of farmers' organizations to the COVID-19 crisis that are analysed in this report were, in part, facilitated and supported by the strategic partnership that those organizations have maintained with IFAD for over 15 years.



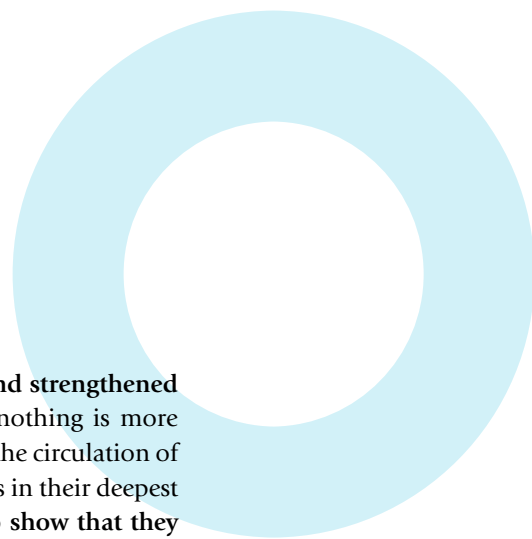
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IFAD would like to thank the representatives of the farmers' and producers' organizations who agreed to take the time to be interviewed, despite the challenges sometimes posed by internet connection issues: CNCR, CTOP, CNOP, CRUS, UNFF, TUNADO, IMBARAGA, CAPAD, COPACO-PRP, FMA, SOA Network, ROFAMA, Fiji Beekeepers Association, ASOANOR, BANELINO, SEWA, LFN, NAMAC, MUCECH, CIOEC, CONTAG, CNFR and FARM. This study would not have been possible without the support and dedication of the representatives and staff of the regional FOs (AFA, COPROFAM, EAFF, PIFON, PROPAC ROPPA, SACAU and UMNAGRI), who helped define the broader context, identify national and local FOs and organize essential teleconferences. The study also benefited from very useful insights and data from representatives of agricultural organizations that support FOs, particularly AFDI and TRIAS.

IFAD would also like to thank the Pan-African Farmers' Organization (PAFO) and AgriCord for offering their advice and reviewing this study.



# Summary



Farmers' and producers' organizations (FOs) have been both **weakened and strengthened by the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic**. Weakened, because nothing is more contrary to the associative dynamic than **physical distancing**; by reducing the circulation of people and exchanges, the global pandemic has severely tested associations in their deepest vocation, which is to forge ties. **Strengthened, because they were able to show that they were an indispensable tool in the hands of rural populations and a valuable partner of the authorities and technical and financial partners in dealing with crises.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit rural populations very unevenly in different parts of the world. In some countries, the disease has taken a heavy toll on family farms. However, it was often the measures adopted by governments to limit the spread of the virus that affected producers the most. These measures, which were similar everywhere, were applied to varying degrees: **border closures, travel restrictions and the limiting of meetings**. In most cases, governments sought to preserve the agricultural sector as much as possible, recognizing its **vital role** in the country. Nonetheless, there have been multiple disruptions upstream and especially downstream in the agricultural sectors. Restrictions on movement have resulted in a slowdown, or even a temporary halt, in the collection of agricultural products. Market, restaurant and school closures and the halt in tourism meant that farmers often found it difficult to sell their produce. For the most vulnerable groups, whose survival depends on their agricultural and non-agricultural activities, the consequences for income and food supply may have been dramatic.

Faced with this triple **health, economic and social crisis**, FOs have been the target of numerous requests by their members, the authorities and technical and financial partners. **They have thus been called on to play a variety of roles, some of them unprecedented.** Thanks to their proximity to farmers and producers, they have often been the only entities able to reach and support rural populations at a time when circulation has been severely restricted. FOs first played a massive **role in health, something completely new to them**, by disseminating information about the disease and barrier measures. In the areas most affected by the virus, they even made rooms available for care of the sick, distributed medical equipment and organized psychological support sessions, among other activities. They have also been called on to play a **major social role**, providing assistance (reimbursable or non-reimbursable) to the poorest people and using formal and informal solidarity mechanisms when possible. Finally, FOs have played a **humanitarian role**, which may have been similar to that of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in emergencies, such as providing cash contributions, as in Asia. In some contexts where COVID-19 has amplified other security and climate crises, **FOs have been at the forefront**, demonstrating exceptional mobilization of humanitarian assistance. In these troubled contexts, governments and NGOs have often turned to FOs for information about the food and agriculture situation in remote areas, targeting strategies and response measures. Almost everywhere in the world, FOs have more traditionally played a **political role**: using monitoring tools and information-gathering systems that are sometimes very sophisticated, they have conducted surveys and studies on the food and health situation and drafted communiqués to alert the authorities and propose



measures in response to the crisis. Finally, FOs have naturally played a major **economic role** by proposing **innovative solutions** to their members to deal with the difficulties involved in selling products and the blockage downstream of the sectors. They have thus re-doubled their efforts in the areas of storage and processing, sought new outlets with processors, traders, importers or public institutions, and sometimes entered into contracts to expand their clientele and build loyalty. It should be noted that union-type FOs have been led to develop economic activities, and, conversely, cooperatives strongly geared to economic services have been led to adopt social measures (reimbursable or non-reimbursable). In short, the crisis has shown that in exceptional circumstances, and in order to respond to numerous needs, it is essential for FOs to be able to assume very different roles and demonstrate versatility.

Contrary to the trend in the past few years, which has consisted of encouraging **FO specialization** in economic functions, **the experience of the pandemic calls, on the one hand, for maintaining and reinforcing a cadre of generalist FOs as a complement to the specialized ones, and on the other, for rehabilitating the social role of FOs in some way.**

**The crisis has also disrupted conventional food systems.** In addition to the upstream and downstream disruptions in country food supply chains, border closures have raised the spectre of a disruption in food supplies from abroad, while paradoxically opening up new opportunities for local production. From North Africa to Haiti to the Pacific region, **new markets for local products** to replace imports have emerged (local cheese, eggs, breadfruit, etc.). States have become aware of the urgency of **increasing their food sovereignty, encouraging local production and strengthening the links between cities and the countryside.** Many FOs, especially those on the outskirts of cities, have taken advantage of this renewed interest in "**consuming locally**" and have sought inventive and often digital answers to the problem of marketing products. In this context, FOs have tried out many collection and direct sales initiatives, including online sales, collective sales points and home delivery. FOs farther away from the places of consumption have embraced and strengthened more traditional solutions to deal with the blockage downstream of the commodity chains, such as the storage and processing of products or contracting.

At the start of this crisis, FOs were in a state of shock and experienced a slowdown or even a complete halt in their activities. Government measures began by blocking all planned activities, especially services such as training, the sharing of experiences and advice to producers. Very quickly, however, while the social and economic context has suffered a form of paralysis, FOs had to **invent new ways of working.** They switched en masse to videoconferencing tools, digital apps and social networks so that they could do their work remotely, even though these methods were not necessarily tailored to rural areas. In fact, rural populations in poor countries are still very unfamiliar with new technologies and have very little equipment, while illiteracy remains common. **Five uses of new technologies were identified:** i) communication (internal and external), ii) monitoring and data collection, iii) monitoring and evaluation, iv) advice and training (e-learning), v) marketing (e-business).

Thanks to these initiatives, FOs have gained a great deal of visibility and legitimacy in the eyes of both their members and their partners. Nonetheless, a big question remains: Will these changes be sustainable? Will food systems gradually evolve toward more resilient models in which FOs will have a greater role? A 2020 survey in Asia concluded that, according to participants, the most significant crisis they faced was not COVID-19 but climate change. Indeed, whatever the short-term political and economic developments, the COVID-19 crisis should perhaps be viewed as a laboratory. In light of the upcoming crises, FOs are likely to play an even greater role tomorrow and must therefore be prepared.

With a view to increasing resilience to current and future crises, this study highlights some issues for FOs to consider and invites them to consider the following points in particular:

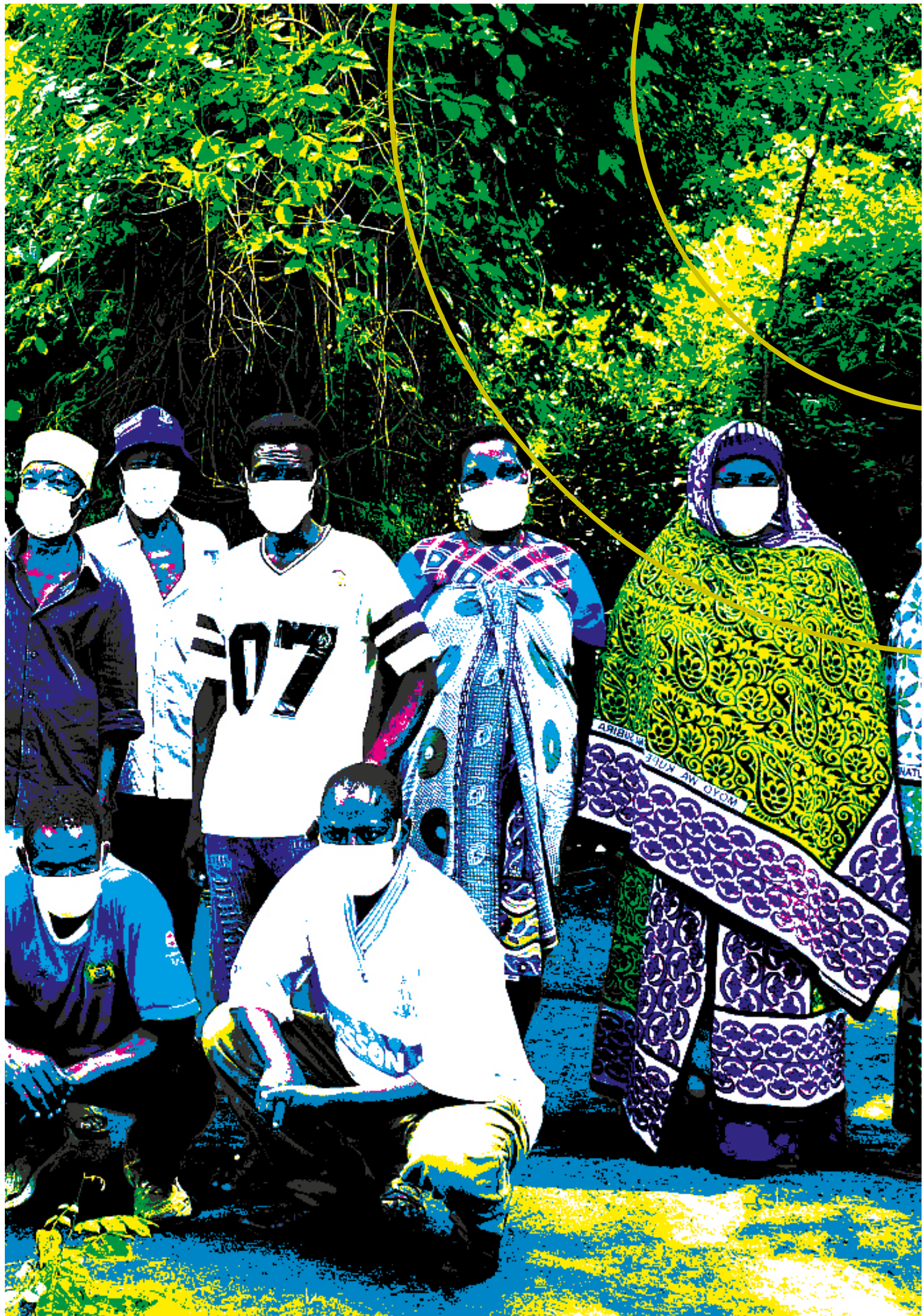
1. **How to strengthen their capacities in terms of crisis prevention and management** by reinforcing monitoring and warning systems, training and the sharing of experiences in crisis management and resilience strategies and the creation of a culture of versatility in FOs.
2. **How to better fulfil their social mission** by developing an approach linking emergencies with development, improving targeting strategies and supporting social protection and formal and informal community solidarity mechanisms.
3. **How to further integrate the resilience-building initiatives of members into their action plans**, which could include agroecological advisory activities or interventions in the diversification, storage, processing and conservation of perishable products.
4. **How to further the promotion of local consumption** by seeking alternatives to imports, improving the quality of the local product supply and increasing the number of short circuits (direct sales, online sales and home delivery).
5. **How to make better use of new technologies** to revive associative life and the usual FO services, especially advisory services and training, by seeking a new balance between in person exchanges and distance work enabled by the recent digital transition.

Based on the questions above, interviews and other exchanges and discussions with farmers' organizations, the following recommendations were made for farmers' organizations, financial and technical partners and governments.<sup>1</sup>

1. A more detailed table of recommendations is included in the analysis on page 38.

	<b>FOs</b>	<b>Technical and financial partners (TFPs)</b>	<b>Authorities</b>
<b>FO capacity-building in crisis prevention and management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build capacity in health and climate <b>risk prevention and management</b></li> <li>• Capitalize on and share the experiences of FOs that have developed <b>strategies and guidelines for good practices</b> in the face of the crisis</li> <li>• Strengthen leaders' capacity in demand analysis and contracting to stabilize outlets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support <b>monitoring and warning systems</b> within FOs</li> <li>• Support the organizational strengthening of FOs in parallel with project-oriented funding</li> <li>• Strengthen FO capacity in risk analysis and mitigation measures</li> </ul>	
<b>Strengthening the social mission of FOs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, capitalize on and share FO initiatives that have <b>strengthened the link between emergency measures and long-term development dynamics</b></li> <li>• <b>Build capacity in humanitarian assistance:</b> aid distribution, targeting approaches, social protection and social transfers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and strengthen the <b>formal and informal solidarity mechanisms</b> of FOs</li> <li>• Strengthen <b>partnerships between FOs</b> (especially cooperatives) <b>and humanitarian actors</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forge <b>partnerships with health authorities</b> in the areas of health, nutrition and hygiene</li> <li>• Recognize FOs as <b>strategic partners</b></li> </ul>
<b>Strengthening members' resilience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengthen the capacity of FO members</b> in food storage, processing and preservation to reduce losses</li> <li>• Forge <b>partnerships with crisis response actors</b></li> <li>• Promote <b>crop diversification and food self-sufficiency</b> through advisory approaches to producers</li> <li>• Build members' capacity in organic inputs, agroecology and climate change farming practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Continue and strengthen support for contracting</b> between FOs and downstream actors</li> <li>• <b>Encourage and support</b> more <b>generalist territorial FOs</b></li> <li>• Strengthen the implementation of <b>agroecology-friendly programmes and policies</b></li> <li>• Strengthen <b>FO contributions to national and regional storage policies</b></li> <li>• <b>Improve access to organic agricultural inputs</b></li> <li>• <b>Create a national livelihood and resilience fund</b></li> </ul>	
<b>Promotion of local consumption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen <b>advocacy for local consumption and food sovereignty</b> (protection of local resources)</li> <li>• Strengthen advocacy for FO access to institutional markets</li> <li>• <b>List and capitalize on FO experiences</b> in the search for old and local varieties, diversification, supplies of alternatives to imported products, the quality of local products, greater appreciation of nutritious local food, short circuits and online sales</li> <li>• Build members' capacity with respect to standards and quality, as well as the marketing and packaging of local products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote and develop <b>local food projects</b> as a complement to industry projects</li> <li>• Include the <b>promotion of local consumption</b> in the guidelines</li> <li>• Encourage the development of <b>short circuits</b> through marketing support programmes for FOs</li> <li>• Strengthen investments in processing, storage and packaging equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop programmes to <b>strengthen national food sovereignty</b> in collaboration with FOs</li> <li>• Encourage the <b>decentralization and relocation of food systems</b></li> <li>• <b>Promote greater FO involvement</b> in national and regional <b>storage policies</b></li> <li>• Give priority to local products in institutional purchases</li> <li>• Support local processing industries and skills transfer</li> <li>• Strengthen research into plant material and invest in local seed production</li> </ul>
<b>Encouragement of rational digitalization of agricultural services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Resume in-person advice</b> in FOs</li> <li>• <b>Capitalize on e-learning experiences</b></li> <li>• Seek a <b>new balance between telework and in-person work by adopting rules</b> for videoconferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Equip FOs with digital tools on a large scale, building capacity in the use of ICTs</b></li> <li>• Forge partnerships with innovative companies and implement pilot projects</li> <li>• Negotiate with banks to create innovative financial products for family farmers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improve network coverage in rural areas;</b> reduce the digital divide</li> </ul>







# Assessment of the multiple roles of farmers' and producers' organizations in the response to the COVID-19 crisis

## Purpose

In 2020 and 2021, regional and national farmers' organizations (RFOs and NFOs, respectively) conducted several studies to assess the impact of the crisis and propose action to respond to it. These analyses of the impact of COVID-19 on small farmers contributed significantly to decision-making processes and to appropriate responses for the agriculture sector in different regions.

This capitalization on experiences with respect to the role of FOs during the COVID-19 pandemic is specifically aimed at analysing the role that FOs played in the immediate and medium-term response to the crisis, as well as the role they expect to play in the longer-term response. The assessment examines how that role changed, FOs' strengths and weaknesses in responding to the crisis, how the COVID-19 crisis differed from previous crises and the lessons learned so far from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Methodology

The following procedure was used in conducting the study:

- **Review of aides-memoires from the 2021 FO4ACP and SAFE 2020 supervision missions.** The idea for this study emerged during the FO4ACP and SAFE 2020 supervision missions carried out between June and September 2021. In exchanges with FOs, a great deal of information was made available about the new activities and roles they had had to take on during the crisis and the challenges they faced.
- **Literature review of existing documents.** A literature review was performed, particularly of the COVID-19 impact studies produced by FOs in 2020 and 2021, to gather both general and specific information. The documents used specifically for this study are listed in appendix 3 of this report. Although many impact studies were conducted, the role that FOs are playing in this crisis has not yet been systematized. The interview questionnaire was based on the aides-memoires, reports and impact studies.
- **Identification of FOs with RFOs, AgriCord and agri-agencies.** NFOs and local FOs (LFO) were identified in collaboration with RFOs, the Pan-African Farmers' Organisation (PAFO), AgriCord and agri-agencies. The RFOs were included in the list of organizations for the interviews because of their comprehensive view of an entire region or subregion. There are currently five RFOs in Africa, one in Asia, one



in the Pacific, one in Latin America and none in the Caribbean. The RFOs, in turn, identified NFOs and LFOs in their region or subregion that implemented specific activities during the COVID-19 crisis. The study sought to balance the three FO levels (RFO, NFO, LFO), as well as their geographical coverage. Given the large number of partners in Africa, the African FOs are the best represented in this study. Appendix 1 contains a list of the FOs that participated in the study.

- **Interviews with LFOs (12), NFOs (11) and RFOs (7).** Thirty FOs at different levels and from different regions participated in the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, with relatively general and open-ended questions. In this type of interview, new questions can be asked if the interviewee brings up an unknown aspect. Focusing on qualitative aspects did not allow for the extraction of statistics but pulled together a certain number of experiences on which the analysis was based.
- **Analysis of the interviews and drafting of the report.** The interviews were analysed, and the main findings are shared in this report. Each interview is also summarized in appendix 2, so that readers can review the responses of FOs from a particular region or country in greater detail.
- **Presentation and discussion with FOs.** This report was shared with and presented to the FO's and was the topic of an online discussion with more than 50 participants, the objective of which was to review the conclusions, recommendations and potential action to take to make the study as relevant as possible.

Links between the study and the FO interview summaries in appendix 2 are included in the report. Readers interested in a specific agricultural organization or country can therefore obtain more information on a particular case. The questionnaire used for the interviews is provided in appendix 4.

## Limitations

The scope of this assessment is extremely broad, as it includes FOs from nearly all regions of the world. It is hard to generalize about the transformations that the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered in FOs at the regional and even global levels, as the situation in each country and for each type of FO is different. This report will therefore make assertions that should be considered hypotheses consistent with the 30 interviews conducted and the various documents used.

It should also be noted that the analyses produced here are based mainly on “stakeholders’ perceptions” not quantitative studies. Moreover, the people interviewed were mainly members of FO secretariats and not smallholder farmers. Finally, the analysis was conducted during the summer of 2021, a little over one year after the crisis began, at a time when the virus was still widely circulating. It should therefore be considered a “preliminary” analysis, bearing in mind that not enough time has passed to have a truly detached perspective on the lasting effects of this crisis.

The study must be considered a living document that will be reviewed with FOs to further improve its content and recommendations and encourage the sharing of experiences in crisis management as membership-based organizations geared to their members: small family farmers.







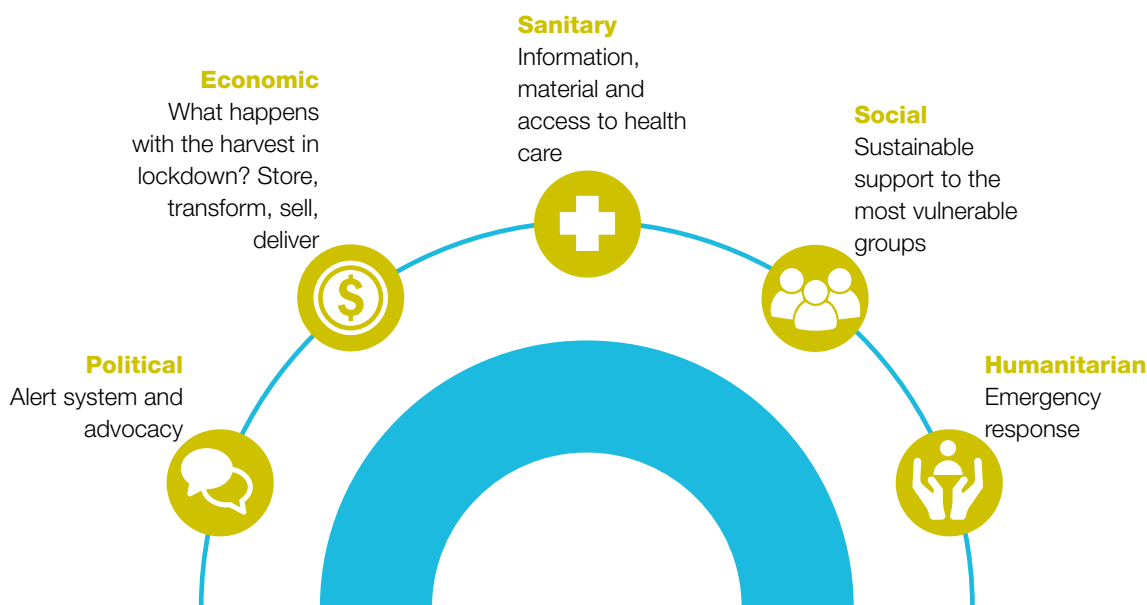
# Cross-disciplinary analysis of the interviews with FOs on their role in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis

There is now abundant literature on the pandemic's impact on rural areas and family farms. FOs themselves have largely contributed to the effort to document it. This report focuses specifically on how FOs were affected and responded to the crisis. We are therefore seeking to understand how the crisis changed the role of FOs and how they adapted and sometimes reinvented themselves in the face of adversity. The impacts are numerous and vary with the region and type of FO: general FOs (union FOs, advisory FOs, women's or young people's FOs, etc.), or value-chain FOs (specializing in a single product) on the one hand, and local FOs or FO networks (national, regional) on the other.

## 1) Multiple roles of farmers' organizations during the crisis

In this first section, we demonstrated that FOs were asked to take on a multiplicity of roles to help their members deal with the consequences of the pandemic. Some of these roles were new for FOs, while others were more "standard." In general, these roles have accumulated in the different types of FOs and have often been imposed on FOs suddenly as circumstances dictate.

### Multiplicity of roles of the FOs during the COVID-19 crisis





### Health role

**Providing care for members.** In most of the countries where this study was conducted, and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, grassroots FO members (unlike FO employees working in cities) were sometimes less affected by the disease itself than by the lockdown measures and restrictions imposed by the government in its attempt to halt the spread of the virus. However, in some large countries, such as India and Brazil, the disease spread massively, even in the countryside. In India, there were 10 deaths per village during the second wave. In Madagascar, mass graves were constructed on roadsides. Faced with these tragic situations, and with their members in distress, FOs (such as the Self Employed Women's Association - SEWA - in India) had to take urgent action that was usually the province of the public health services: making rooms available for testing and treating patients, distributing oximeters, setting up an information system to monitor hospital occupancy and providing medical and psychological support. In Latin America, several FOs mounted an advocacy campaign to get farmers vaccinated, arguing that priority should be given to vaccinating farmers because they are essential to the country's food supply.

#### Statement from representatives of SEWA (India)

"We produced natural medicines and gave them to members, because they didn't have enough money to buy medicine or food. Food kits were also distributed. For patients with symptoms, it was very difficult and expensive to get tested. A service offering COVID-19 tests at a reduced price was set up for SEWA members. As hospitals were full at one point in time, devices for measuring oxygen (oximeters) were distributed so that they would know when they needed to go to hospital. The second wave was very difficult, as hospitals were full. In certain villages, we began clearing community centres to set up a place where people could isolate while receiving medical care in rural areas. During the second wave, there were about 10 COVID-19 deaths in each village, and people were really scared. There was very little access to medical care, and it wasn't possible to go to hospitals in urban areas. Special phone numbers were created so that people could obtain information and advice on COVID-19 over the phone. Awareness-raising materials were also developed and shared within the groups using electronic media."

**Health information.** In nearly all countries, FOs launched campaigns to raise awareness and inform people about COVID-19, what to do if they developed symptoms, COVID-19 safety measures, etc. These campaigns employed multiple communication channels: rural radio stations, television, posters, flyers, social networks, etc. Protective supplies were also distributed (masks, alcohol-based gel, soap, etc.). This health-focused role was sometimes coupled with a new partnership between FOs and the health authorities. In Mali, the Ministry of Health asked the National Coordination of Farmers' Organizations (Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes, or CNOP) to help raise awareness and monitor the spread of COVID-19 in rural areas. In Togo, agents from the Ministry of Health accompanied the Togolese Coordination of Farmers' Organizations (Coordination Togolaise des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles, or CTOP) during its visits to villages to disseminate information in addition to the organization's activities. In Haiti and Mali, thanks to all those COVID-19 information campaigns, an unexpected effect of the crisis was better hygiene in the processing and packaging of agricultural products in remote areas.



**FOs complementing state efforts.** Why did FOs play this health-focused role? On the face of it, an FO does not have any health-related skills. It was a first for many of them. Moreover, it should be noted that this role was not assumed solely by union or general FOs. Value-chain FOs, such as The Uganda National Apiculture Development Organisation (TUNADO) in Uganda and Ronono Faritra Matsiatra Ambony (ROFAMA) in Madagascar, also relayed information on COVID-19 safety measures. In countries that were hard-hit (such as India, where FOs' health-focused role was far reaching), it is clear that FOs took on a role that will gain strength locally to complement efforts by the state. In other countries as well, FOs say they helped relay information because the state was not very effective in rural areas. Nearly all the FO representatives interviewed said that farmers were sceptical of official statements. Many grassroots members believed that COVID-19 was at best a foreign disease that came from Westerners or an urban problem that didn't concern them. The fact that FOs took up the issue lent credibility to the message. FOs were reliable sources of information in the eyes of their members. In Brazil, the official line also needed to be countered: The government itself downplayed the danger posed by the disease and, according to FOs, contributed to the spread of the virus, exposing people in rural areas to public health risks. These examples show that FOs themselves can help protect people where public services are lacking.



### **Economic role**

In most of the countries where we conducted the study, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on FO members was mainly socio-economic, due to the restrictions imposed to halt the spread of the virus. There were three main types of restrictions: movement restrictions, limits on gatherings and border closures. These measures generally sought to preserve certain economic sectors considered essential to the nation, notably agriculture. Unfortunately, they had major repercussions on value chain operations and, consequently, on farmers themselves.

**Impediments downstream in the value chains.** One of the main problems farmers faced was the inability to sell their products. Market, hotel and restaurant closures and the reduction – and in some cases total suspension – of public transport and collection, disrupted many valuable outlets for farmers, particularly in value chains for perishable goods (fruit, vegetables, animal products). Major losses ensued; dairy farmers had to dispose of their milk, and farmers had no choice but to sell their harvest quickly and cheaply, sometimes outside group circuits and cooperatives, in a climate of fear and uncertainty about the future.

Ronono Faritra Matsiatra Ambony (ROFAMA) is a dairy cooperative located in central Madagascar. It has 337 members. Before the crisis, it collected 600 litres of milk per day. However, with the crisis, the cooperative had so much trouble selling its milk that its board of directors decided to start collecting only 300 litres per day, with devastating consequences for dairy farmers. For every 10 litres produced, only 5 were collected. Farmers had to sell the rest at half price or feed it to their pigs. At the farm level, the loss of income was substantial. To get through the crisis, maintain staff (24 employees), continue collection and processing and buy a portion of the milk on credit from the most vulnerable members, the cooperative had to borrow from the bank. To find markets, it created a home delivery service using a tricycle subsidized by the French Farmers and International Development (Agriculteurs Français et Développement International, or AFDI) agricultural organization. The situation has now improved, but it will be a while before the cooperative rebounds. Its members have two cows, on average. Thirteen members had to sell one of their cows, and one had to sell both.

### **Serious consequences for milk collection: the case of ROFAMA**

**Storage and processing.** FOs proposed a wide range of solutions for storing or processing fresh products (for preservation), as their means permitted. In Guinea, FPFID bought half the potato harvest from its members on credit. This strategy requires having the right infrastructure, particularly for perishable goods (cold rooms). FOs must also be able to bear the cost of the strategy (warehouse rental, electricity, security, etc.). In Uganda, the TUNADO organization is building a multipurpose complex that will offer warehousing services, a mini laboratory and a processing facility. In Burkina Faso, the Regional Council of Unions in the Sahel (Conseil Régional des Unions du Sahel, or CRUS) began producing vacuum-packed meat, and an FO in Samoa launched a line of frozen foods. Such initiatives require investment (sometimes substantial) and skilled human resources, which are not always easy to find quickly in a crisis.

**Searching for alternative outlets.** FOs already offering collection and marketing services improved their systems, sometimes by investing in vehicles and offering home delivery (Uganda, Togo, Mongolia, Madagascar), if they had the means to do so. Some FOs began offering their own marketing services, among them CTOP in Togo, which offered to buy a portion of its members' production and then sell the products through its own points of sale. Other FOs tried to strengthen contractual ties and forge new partnerships with processors, traders, importers and public institutions (Rwanda, Senegal, Togo). Finally, FOs that were not necessarily specialized in marketing developed their own alternative system for marketing and selling products to traders or directly to consumers through online sales (Madagascar) or by setting up points of sale (India).

**Contractual arrangements.** Another way FOs tried to solve marketing problems was by entering into new partnerships with public buyers (state, international organizations, schools, etc.) and private buyers (processors, traders) through contractual arrangements. In Rwanda, Togo and Burkina Faso, FOs forged partnerships with maize and rice processors and frozen chicken importers or signed contracts to supply food to mines and hospitals. In Senegal, a model for a contractual relationship between groundnut producers and local processors that included financial institutions was successfully tested. Once the crisis abates, the National Council for Dialogue and Rural Cooperation (Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux, or CNCR) is considering expanding the three-party contracting model to include the cashew value chain to secure markets in the event of a crisis.

### **Senegal: contractual arrangements between FOs and groundnut processing industries**

Since 2016, the Senegalese Association for the Promotion of Grassroots-level Development (ASPRODEB)/CNCR and its members have been supplying groundnuts to COPEOL Senegal and CAIT under a contractual arrangement. The current model allows for the prefinancing of inputs (seeds and fertilizers) by industry firms and the marketing of production. During the 2017/2018 crop year, 25,924 hectares were sown to wheat, using 2,330 tonnes of certified seed and 3,945 tonnes of NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) fertilizer, at a total cost of FCFA 1.2 trillion. Farmers delivered 41,293 tonnes for a contractual target of 21,700 tonnes. For the 2018/2019 crop year, the contract covers 80,000 hectares. In all, 11,667 tonnes of certified seed and 11,667 tonnes of NPK fertilizer with a total cost of FCFA 4.08 trillion was provided by the COPEOL plant. WAO and Patisen (partners of the FO) expressed a desire to join this group of industry firms this crop year. In order to buttress this model, ASPRODEB entered into a contract with the Senegalese Agricultural Research Institute (Institut Sénégalais de Recherche Agricole, or ISRA) to supply pre-basic seeds and is also working with the National Agricultural Credit Fund of Senegal (CNCAS) to strengthen the foundations of the model's sustainable funding.


**Collective marketing as a strategy for dealing with the crisis.** Some FOs launched new activities and innovations at the request of their members, while others improved activities they were already engaged in. It may therefore be said that the crisis led FOs – whether general FOs or value-chain FOs – to intensify their efforts and innovate with respect to market access. Collective marketing solutions appear to have sparked new interest among farmers. We know that such options are sometimes considered demanding for farmers, as they require strict commitments (price, quantity, quality, payment deadlines, etc.). In this case, group sales are no longer viewed as simply an economic strategy for obtaining better prices but as a crisis strategy to preserve outlets should there be disruptions downstream in the value chains.

Paradoxically, movement restrictions and the interruption of collection in certain regions also had beneficial effects for some FOs. For example, the National Association of Mongolian Agricultural Cooperatives (NAMAC) in Mongolia collected four times more cashmere after the Chinese collectors left. Since the FO had its own trucks, it was able to organize expanded collection all on its own, and since it had developed strong ties with a buyer who was looking for the product, selling the cashmere was not a problem. The exceptional increase in revenue enabled the FO to establish a social policy in its shop and allow members to buy goods on credit.

### **Beneficial effects of the crisis for FOs: the case of Mongolia**



#### **Social and humanitarian role**



**Social distress.** The crisis affected everyone living in rural areas. Those who suffered the most from sudden unexpected unemployment were poor farmers, agricultural labourers, dayworkers, people earning some of their income from non-agricultural activities who sometimes must travel to the city as itinerant vendors and people who depended on a salary to feed themselves. Not surprisingly, vulnerable women and young people were the most severely impacted. However, it should be noted that well-off or middle-income farmers in cash-crop markets also had problems marketing and selling their products, particularly for export. Finally, livestock farmers (particularly transhumant livestock farmers) were especially impacted by border closures and sometimes had to sell their animals to get through the crisis. We should add that the health crisis occurred in tandem with other crises in certain places, such as West Africa, where insecurity and climate change have created a “permanent crisis” whose consequences have only been amplified by the pandemic.

**Solidarity.** With part of the population facing these very difficult conditions, nearly all FOs engaged in social or humanitarian activities, but to varying degrees. Many distributed aid to vulnerable people (often women and young people) in the form of food, livestock feed and production kits: seeds, fertilizer, small livestock, etc. (Burundi, Togo, Senegal, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Burkina Faso and India). FOs in Asia distributed large amounts of cash (cash transfers). In Senegal, CNCR bought rice from its members in order to redistribute it as food aid to vulnerable people. In Madagascar, FOs gave away bags of rice in the southern part of the island where there was a famine. In addition to distributing aid, FOs made use of formal and informal solidarity mechanisms: tontines, solidarity funds, insurance, etc. (Tunisia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, West Africa). It should be noted that this social role was not taken on solely by general or union FOs but by value-chain FOs as well. The ROFAMA cooperative in Madagascar used a bank loan to offer advances on milk purchases to members who were struggling the most. In Mongolia, NAMAC allowed its members to buy food on credit.



**Social or humanitarian?** The fact that FOs mobilized to play a social and humanitarian role is not at all new or surprising. FOs have always been engaged in such work. What has changed is that some are now more willingly engaging in humanitarian activities, providing one-off aid to members and non-members alike in response to an emergency. Such actions are sometimes encouraged by the authorities, NGOs or donors, and to carry them out, FOs had to start using the right tools and targeting criteria; the West African Network of Peasants and Agricultural Producers (Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, or ROPPA) proposed a guide for its member FOs. This humanitarian role appears to have grown in FOs as a result of the pandemic, particularly in West Africa, which has been hit by multiple crises. In this region, and particularly in the Sahel, FOs are increasingly asking to be more involved in emergency activities by asserting their role as a local, long-term stakeholder – a role that programmes such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and international NGOs cannot assume. FOs are also well-positioned to provide a continuum between emergency actions and development actions (medium- and long-term), a principle increasingly sought in areas prone to recurring crises. The creation of the **Monitoring and Action Committee (MAC)** by the Association for the Promotion of Livestock Farming in the Sahel and Savanna Regions (Association pour la Promotion de l'Élevage au Sahel et en Savane, or APESS), the Billital Maroobé Network (Réseau Billital Maroobé, or RBM) and ROPPA shows that FO networks in West Africa are determined to play a new role to help prevent and manage crises.

**Main MAC missions (summary taken from the presentation note, April 2020)**

“The three networks (APESS, RBM, ROPPA) are committed to setting up a Monitoring and Action Committee that aims to be a space to encourage and structure cooperation between all FO and civil society organization (CSO) networks in the face of the current crises.” According to that note, the Committee's main missions are to: a) mobilize FO and CSO networks (relay and disseminate messages to raise awareness and mobilize members, monitor the effects of crises on family farms, support and participate in targeting and/or support and even management of humanitarian aid, produce notes on the situation and development of crises); b) support measures to maintain or restore production capacity for crisis-affected family farms (organize observation and assessment of needs; monitor support of family farms by public services); and c) conduct forward-looking thinking (establish a task force to conduct forward-looking reflections on the various crises, take action to promote political dialogue, monitor the implementation of sustainable crisis exit solutions and recovery plans).



**Political role**

**Response measures.** Governments tried to save agriculture from the crisis and preserve national production capacity to ensure food security for all. Agriculture was considered an essential sector, and measures applying to other sectors were reviewed, given the importance of ensuring continuity in the agriculture sector. Several countries also implemented action plans, as their means permitted, to help the people most affected by the crisis, including family farmers, through safety nets, tax exemptions, etc. In many countries, FOs were involved in the design of plans to mitigate the effects of the crisis on agriculture. However, in other countries, such as Togo, Madagascar, Haiti and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, FOs did not have as much of a say as they would have liked.

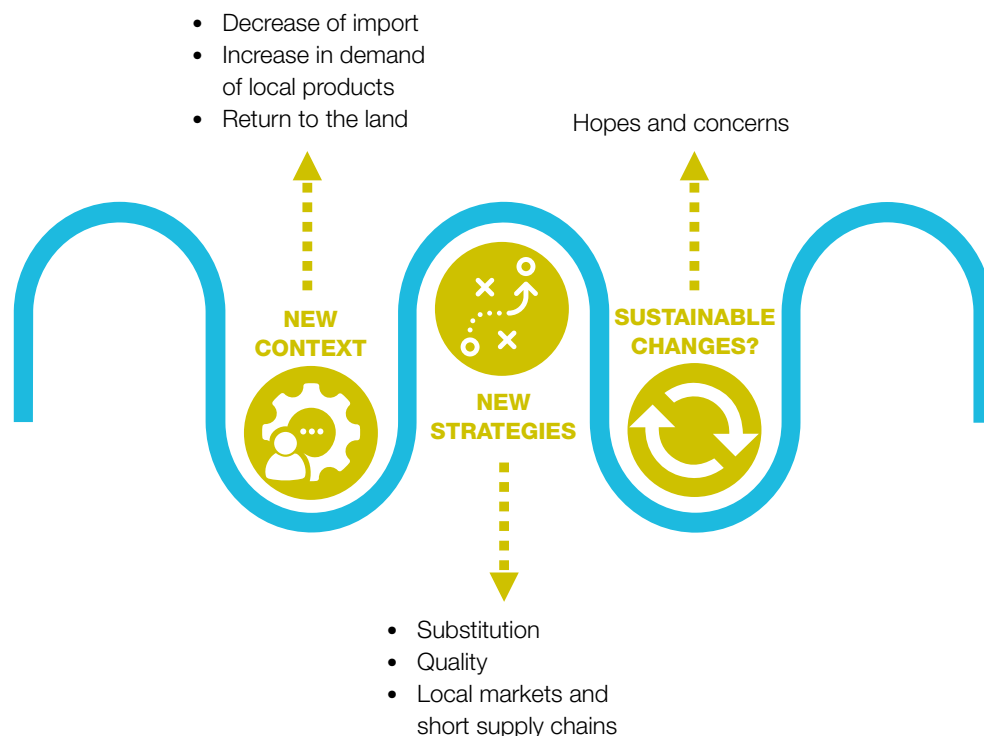
**Monitoring and advocacy.** FOs were very active in advocacy to try to alleviate their members' distress. Almost every FO interviewed took steps to alert the authorities and defend the interests of their members during the crisis: notes, remote meetings, use of the media and social networks. Many donors were asked to adapt and sometimes increase their support during the crisis. ROPPA advocated to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) to launch a call for projects to support family farming and FOs in their response to the COVID-19 crisis. To inform their advocacy notes, FOs conducted field surveys on the impact of COVID-19 on family farms (FF) and sometimes set up systematic monitoring (almost in real time). The APSS, RBM and ROPPA networks in West Africa regularly published bulletins drawing on their information systems – for example, the Inter-Réseaux bulletins (information monitoring systems, observatories). These bulletins were specially adapted and requested for monitoring the impact of COVID-19, even though they were not initially intended to be used for this purpose. In the Pacific and Asia regions, many FOs also developed systems for collecting information about farms (mainly for managerial advisory services) using digital tools: the TraSeable Farms App for members of the Pacific Island Farmers' Organisation Network (PIFON), and FarmerLink for TUNADO in Uganda are just a few examples.

**Tensions with the authorities.** The crisis containment measures and movement restrictions introduced sometimes gave rise to heated debate between FOs and the authorities. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, there were vigorous debates with national and local authorities, as well as the police, regarding the movements of FOs that were trying to respond to demand in areas with no food supplies. Border closures in West Africa provoked a crisis for pastoralism by hindering the movements of transhumant livestock farmers. According to one ROPPA representative, the public authorities did not hold the usual consultations before introducing new measures and laws. The argument of office closures and the inability to gather was sometimes used to impose decisions that were not very democratic. For example, a project for the sedentarization of livestock farmers suddenly emerged. In Madagascar, the government tried to advance a land reform measure and an organic farming law without sufficiently involving FOs. Depending on the case, the development of virtual consultations and Zoom meetings with 100 people made it harder than ever to influence decision makers, inform them about farmers' concerns and hold them accountable.

## **2) Farmers' organizations at the heart of a reconfiguration of food systems**

FOs have fought on multiple fronts to reduce the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their members. At the same time, they have tried to seize opportunities that have arisen while supporting the start of a major shift in agriculture that could become a deep-rooted trend in the future. By exposing weaknesses in conventional food systems, the crisis has led to a reconfiguration of production and distribution channels, opening the door to shorter value chains and closer ties between farmers and consumers and reviving the demand for high-quality local products. FOs have supported this phenomenon by developing several different strategies.

### FOs at the heart of a reconfiguration of food systems



#### The crisis has shaken up food systems: main changes

**Increased demand for local products.** Border closures and marketing difficulties led to disruptions in supply and distribution chains for certain imported foods, shifting demand to local products. Haiti is a particularly illuminating example: Border closures there led to a sudden shortage of eggs, which were primarily imported from the neighbouring Dominican Republic. The situation created an opportunity for many farmers and FOs, who began producing and selling eggs to meet the demand. In North Africa, the crisis led to an increase in local cheese production as a substitute for imported cheeses.

**Return to the land.** Some FOs, in the Pacific region, for instance, saw an influx of new members and renewed enthusiasm among the general public. The Pacific islands are highly dependent on tourism, and the pandemic gave rise to a wave of unemployment and a “return to the land.” People formerly employed in the tourism sector returned en masse to the countryside to grow crops and plant home gardens. Many of them wanted to join FOs and receive advice, training and seed supplies, for example. The Fiji Beekeepers Association is a good example: During the crisis and at its height, the association was receiving 20 requests for training per week, and its Facebook page grew from 1,000 to 6,700 followers. In this region, PIFON noted that the image of local farming has substantially improved since the crisis. In Ethiopia and Nigeria, many struggling young people in cities requested aid from the authorities to launch urban farming projects. In Kenya and other African countries, school and university closures and all kinds of difficulties drove many young people to return to the countryside and (temporarily?) resume farming.



“Unemployment rose considerably with the decline of the tourism industry in the Pacific, and many people turned to agriculture. There was growing interest among the general public for the services offered by FOs, and some of those organizations saw their membership increase. In the countries where there were no restrictions on meetings/gatherings, learning exchanges between farmers continued in the field; and in the countries where restrictions were imposed because of the presence of COVID-19 in their communities, training activities were organized using different apps such as Viber and WhatsApp. A virtual platform called Breadfruit People was established and open to everyone interested to exchange on this commodity”.

**Statement from a representative of PIFON**

**Shorter value chains.** In general, government measures in response to COVID-19 had relatively little impact on production, but they had major repercussions on value-chain operations: supply of inputs upstream, and processing and marketing downstream. The longest value chains were the most affected, as was production located far from consumers. Short value chains and local circuits, on the other hand, fared best, as did farmers located on the outskirts of cities. Several FO representatives said that the drop in prices for cash crops (cotton, cacao, etc.), coupled with difficulty gaining access to imported inputs could drive farmers to focus more on crops intended for the local market. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, pineapple producers who have had difficulty exporting their products say they plan to shift their production to cowpea and beans.



### **FOs have adapted to these changes**

**Alternatives to imported inputs.** In response to these changes, FOs have launched initiatives and tried to take advantage of new opportunities. For example, in response to rising imported fertilizer prices and supply disruptions, FOs helped farmers by offering training to show them how to produce their own organic manure (Mali). During that training, farmers began to view agroecology as an approach that is not only environmentally friendly but makes them less dependent on imports and more autonomous. Likewise, some countries that are heavily dependent on imported inputs found local substitutes. In Mauritania, FOs rediscovered a variety of local fodder seeds that were no longer being used but yielded good results. Likewise, in Senegal, CNCR initiated the development of local seed capital in the potato value chain. In Chile, there are discussions on improving local legumes.

**Improving the supply of local products.** To meet the surplus demand for local products, FOs have made efforts in packaging in North Africa, India and the Pacific islands. In Haiti and Mali, efforts in hygiene following the crisis improved the quality of local products and made them more attractive. In Samoa, tea had been produced primarily for export, but with the crisis, FOs had to reconsider the local market and introduced a wide variety of “tonics” for local consumers. In this region, we have noticed overall greater interest in traditional food crops, such as breadfruit, since the start of the pandemic. A virtual platform created by PIFON called Breadfruit People was created during the crisis to promote the cultivation of breadfruit and organize exchanges and webinars since early 2021 in partnership with researchers to further explore the potential of breadfruit, particularly in connection with climate change, for the local market.

**Closer ties between FOs and urban consumers.** In sub-Saharan Africa, the well-known problem of disconnect between city and countryside was particularly laid bare by the crisis. FO efforts to find outlets helped bring farmers and city consumers closer together and build bridges between city and countryside. Direct sales and online sales in particular were abundantly tested during the crisis and will look to continue beyond the crisis.

- **Direct sales.** For FOs, this involves collecting the harvest from members and selling it directly to consumers without going through intermediaries (for instance, at the FOs' own points of sale). In India, many women from the SEWA association were left with no one to collect their market gardening harvest. With its members in distress, SEWA quickly developed a system for selling directly to consumers in cities. That system is still in use today and is expected to continue beyond the crisis. In Togo, CTOP collected 5,000 tonnes of maize from its members to supply its 10 points of sale in Lomé.

### Overview of the direct sales system set up by SEWA in India

“Working simultaneously in the rural and urban sectors with women in the informal economy, SEWA decided to put female farmers from the rural districts of Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar in contact with customers in the city of Ahmedabad. Doing so would allow urban consumers to buy fresh vegetables straight from the farm, with minimal human contact and ample protective measures. It would also allow female farmers in rural areas to obtain market rates, even during closures due to COVID-19, for the crops they worked so hard to grow. On the supply side, SEWA has rural members who are small farmers from districts around the city of Ahmedabad: Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Mehsana, and Aravalli – all located between 40 km and 110 km from Ahmedabad. Those farmers usually sold their vegetables wholesale at the Ahmedabad-Jamalpur market or at the Dehgam market. Logistically, an opportunity lay in the fact that SEWA already had a physical space – the Kamala centre in Bodakdev, Ahmedabad – where the Kamala restaurant, managed by a group of poor urban women, was closed during COVID-19. The space was therefore available for selling vegetables. On the demand side, there was a WhatsApp group for Kamala customers who could be contacted even for vegetables. For marketing, the opportunity was that RUDI, another social enterprise promoted by SEWA, planned to start selling its grains and spices to urban customers at the same time as Kamala, which had been granted permission to prepare and sell its bakery products during the closure. Vegetables could therefore be linked to the sale of those two products. With such demand, supply, logistics, and market opportunities, a collective plan was drawn up for the three enterprises: To sell the three products: vegetables, RUDI's grains/spices, and Kamala's bakery products at the Kamala centre, where customers could go to shop while observing the usual precautions. Customers could also use social media to place orders for home delivery, with cashless payment during COVID-19 for orders over a certain amount.”

- **Online sales.** FFOs offer their customers the opportunity to order online through an app, a platform or a social network. The products are either delivered to the customer's home or to a pick up point. In Mongolia, NAMAC developed an online sales platform with secure online payment as well. Many FOs in East Africa – Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya in particular – used digital platforms such as e-Granary and ICT4Farmers to sell their products. The Ugandan FO TUNADO developed an online boutique called World of Bees.

This is an innovative digital solution developed by the Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF) based on mobile phones. The digital platform provides information, services and agricultural products in the following areas: access to markets, financial services, extension and advisory services, certified inputs and weather information. The platform operates in collaboration with a private company called Export Trading Group and a microfinance institution called Vision Fund Kenya. E-Granary was launched in 2016 and currently serves roughly 240,000 farmers in Kenya, 15,000 in Uganda and 5,000 in Rwanda. E Granary also facilitates contractual arrangements between buyers and family farmers. These contracts are used by farmers as a guarantee for gaining access to seeds, fertilizers and equipment. EAFF also offers advice through the e-Granary app on what types of crops to plant depending on weather conditions to reduce crop losses.

## E-Granary

- **Home delivery.** When a consumer places an order, the FO itself transports its products to the consumer. In Madagascar, ROFAMA used its own vehicles (motorbikes) and received a grant for a tricycle to deliver dairy products to large buyers ordering by phone. That strategy incurs extra costs (human resources, fuel), which are passed on to the customer. Many FOs in countries such as Uganda, Togo and Mongolia developed strategies for home delivery during lockdown.
- **Mobile markets.** In Bolivia, mobile markets have long existed and are organized in partnership with the local authorities. Itinerant, temporary points of sale are organized in neighbourhoods or areas far from distribution centres. Farmers and their products are taken to the markets in trucks that stop at the different market locations at set times announced in advance.





### Sustainable relocation?

**Greater government awareness.** In countries highly dependent on food imports, disruptions in value chains, and especially border closures, have exposed the fragility of conventional food systems and sparked renewed interest among the authorities and general public in two areas that FOs have long been committed to: food sovereignty and local consumption. In Senegal, the government recently turned to CNCR to jointly draft a national food sovereignty programme (see below) that is a first for the region. The Senegalese government is also working in conjunction with FOs on a plan to develop family farming (in response to the recent GAFSP call for projects). In Latin America, family farming support policies have a long tradition but appear to have been reaffirmed during the crisis, as evidenced by the Uruguayan government's decision during the crisis to allocate 20 per cent of the Ministry of Agriculture's budget to family farms.

**Excerpt from the Agricultural Programme for Sustainable Food Sovereignty (Programme Agricole pour la Souveraineté alimentaire Durable, or PASAD), Senegal, 2020**

"Efforts by the state, technical and financial partners, the private sector and other development stakeholders to support the agricultural sector now risk being compromised by the COVID-19 pandemic, which poses a serious threat to productive and economic activity worldwide, and particularly in Senegal, making women and youth in rural areas more vulnerable. Senegal is still dependent on imports of certain food products, such as rice, maize, onion, potato, wheat, etc. One of the consequences of COVID-19 is the high probability of agricultural underproduction at the global level or prioritization by the main food-exporting countries, which would likely lead to an unprecedented deficit in countries that import staple foods, as seen in the studies conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)."

**Risks of returning to the way things were before the crisis.** At this writing, while the virus continues to circulate and claim victims throughout the world, the peak of the crisis appears to be behind us, and most day-to-day activities in agricultural sectors and FOs have resumed. It is very hard to say whether the changes observed in food systems during the crisis will last. With regard to the opinions of certain governments and the general public, we have noticed that, generally, local products and family farming now have a better image. However, the forces pushing toward a return to the way things were before the crisis should not be underestimated. CTOP, for example, reminds us that major interests are at stake, particularly when it comes to trade policies. Importers have a powerful lobby, and the authorities do not appear to be ready to take them on. Food sovereignty has probably won a few battles in this crisis, but it certainly has not won the war. According to some FO representatives, the enthusiasm for local farming was short-term and will fade once exports resume. Others believe that the crisis will have a lasting effect and leave its mark on consumer behaviour.

### 3) Farmers' organizations weakened by the crisis

FOs went through a great deal during the crisis. Sometimes they were strengthened, and sometimes they were weakened. They grew stronger vis-à-vis their members, because they offered more services, including new ones. They also grew stronger vis-à-vis the authorities and governments, who took note of their commitment during the crisis, giving them greater legitimacy. However, FOs were also weakened: associative life (which is central to their existence) suddenly came to a standstill, advisory and support services were suspended and financial resources were not enough to allow them to fully fulfil their role.

#### Strengthened and weakened farmers' organizations



#### Difficulties in associative life

**Fewer exchanges.** Nothing is more detrimental to collective work than social distancing. By limiting the movement of people and trade, the global COVID-19 pandemic severely hindered associations' ability to realize their fundamental purpose of connecting people. Limits and bans on meetings had an impact on associative life. While most FOs were able to hold virtual or phone meetings for their bureau or board of directors, this was not the case for larger meetings such as trainings, general assemblies and exchange visits. Relations between members, elected representatives and employees grew more complicated. Many FOs had to postpone their general assemblies and extend the mandates of elected representatives indefinitely. Disruptions in statutory meetings led to difficulties and delays in internal communication, the circulation of information and decision-making.

**Virtual communication as an alternative solution.** In order to solve internal communication problems, nearly all FOs made use of virtual tools such as WhatsApp groups for leaders and employees, online platforms, Facebook, teleconferences and Zoom meetings. Phones were also widely used when internet connection was unavailable. The crisis thus drove FOs to modernize their communication tools. Although the situation varies widely from country to country (depending on the telephone network and internet coverage), a growing number of peasant-farmer leaders now have a Facebook account and a phone – and more and more now have a smartphone.

**Advantages and disadvantages of new information and communication technologies.** The development of new information and communication technologies (NICTs) for internal communication and partner relations has advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it results in substantial savings for FOs in terms of per diems, travel and hotel expenses, and other costs. It also allows for greater circulation of information, and the use of social networks enables young people to play a greater role, as they are more skilled at using these tools than their elders. In Rwanda, one unexpected effect of the crisis was that it raised the profile of young people within the FOs, as they were given more responsibilities in the use of NICTs and in training their elders. Fewer field missions also enable teams to become more independent and delegate responsibilities. Nonetheless, FOs also noted serious disadvantages. First, unequal access to phone and internet networks is a serious handicap. In Madagascar, it is sometimes necessary to travel 5 km to recharge phones. Communication quality is often mediocre, and many peasant-farmer leaders are virtually unreachable. In addition, remote monitoring missions are generally described as laborious and not very effective. Finally, the COVID-19 crisis and generalization of remote working has led to the excessive use of NICTs. Many FO representatives describe their daily work as an exhausting succession of Zoom meetings resulting in near total inefficiency, and they are asking for limits on the number and length of meetings.

### **Disruptions in advisory services**

**Weaker advisory services.** Movement restrictions and limits on gatherings had a significant impact on FO services, especially advisory services and training. Nearly all the FOs interviewed said they had had difficulty maintaining these services during the health crisis. Fear of contagion limited the possibilities of gathering people together, as in Uganda – so much so that FOs often made do with individual advisory services, thereby assisting far fewer farmers. It should be noted that movement restrictions had a heavy impact at the grassroots level and in the countryside. In some countries, such as Burkina Faso, except for a brief moment of panic, FOs could still provide services at the grassroots level more or less as usual. However, in many other countries where measures were stricter and in remote areas, advisory services were the main victim of COVID-19 in terms of FO services.

**Resourcefulness and use of technology as a crutch.** The limits on public transportation meant that FO advisors had to use their own means of transportation to visit members: motorbikes for those fortunate enough to have one, and bicycles for others. Thanks to Rwanda's topography, advisors in the country were able to use megaphones to provide advisory services to people who were distanced from one another. Many FOs sought to use digital tools to provide advisory services and training and to develop videos, digital platforms, applications and telephone advisory services (Togo, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Uganda, etc.). In terms of e-advisory services and e-learning, very few FOs found solutions that they felt were satisfactory. Most FOs say that NICTs are useful as an additional tool in advisory services but are no substitute for in-person services.



### **FOs weakened financially**

**Fewer resources.** Most FOs experienced financial difficulties following the pandemic. First of all, the payment of member contributions to FOs generally fell because of a drop in family farm income and service disruptions. Moreover, the reduction in and disruption of activities that had been planned and budgeted by FOs led to requests for budget reallocations and amendments with their partners, which were sometimes accepted and sometimes rejected. Finally, FOs that generated income from their economic services (provision of inputs, marketing) generally suffered from the aforementioned value chain disruptions.






**Borrowing.** Economic FOs, such as the ROFAMA dairy cooperative in Madagascar, saw a very sharp drop in revenue because of their inability to market their products. The cooperative therefore decided to borrow from banks to maintain a minimum level of activity and avoid insolvency. Some FOs received additional grants during the crisis, but that was not the case for most FOs, which had to revise their budgets downwards.

**Exceptions.** Other FOs searched widely for funding and received additional international aid and grants. Some, like CRUS (Burkinabe member of Réseau Bilital Maroobe), saw their budget increase substantially. The following numbers are enough to show the scale of the change: “We went from 18 to 73 employees after the COVID-19 crisis.” Other FOs said they had had trouble managing the exceptional influx of donations.

## **4) Lessons learned**

At the height of the COVID-19 crisis, FOs were called on heavily by their members, the authorities and technical and financial partners. In different ways, depending on the context, they were impelled to fight on all fronts to combat the adverse effects of the pandemic. Frequently used by their members as bastions against the crisis, FOs often had to play a combined health, social, economic and political role. At the same time, they were at the forefront of a significant shift in agriculture that could become entrenched in the future. They sought models to respond to the sudden increase in the demand for high-quality local products. Ultimately, two years after the start of this unprecedented global crisis, FOs enjoy greater legitimacy but are experiencing tensions from a technical and financial standpoint. This situation underscores the need for discussions on how to better enable FOs to protect farmers in future crises and help food systems transition to more resilient, decentralized models.

**Lessons learned and way forward**

 <p><b>CRISIS PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT</b></p>	 <p><b>SOCIAL ROLE OF FOS</b></p>	 <p><b>RESILIENCE</b></p>	 <p><b>CONSUMING LOCALLY</b></p>	 <p><b>NEW WAYS OF WORKING</b></p>
<p><b>Build FO capacity in crisis prevention and management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alert systems</li> <li>• Strategies</li> <li>• Versatility</li> </ul>	<p><b>Importance of the social role of FOs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance and evolution of contribution to public health</li> <li>• Emergency and development approach</li> <li>• Targeting</li> <li>• Formal and informal solidarity mechanisms</li> </ul>	<p><b>Integration of members' resilience in action plans</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agroecology</li> <li>• Diversification</li> <li>• Storage</li> <li>• Transformation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Increase local consumption</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substitution</li> <li>• Quality</li> <li>• Short supply chains</li> </ul>	<p><b>Rethink the way(s) of working</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balance between remote and physical presence in community life and for advisory services</li> </ul>



**The crisis served as an opportunity for FOs to strengthen their capacity in crisis prevention and management**

**Anticipating future crises, especially the climate crisis.** According to the FOs interviewed, what makes this crisis unique is its unprecedented scale and the uncertainty as to when it will end. The pandemic generally brought things to a standstill, created a logistics crisis and had a major impact on work methods. The study of FO reactions and their strategies for dealing with COVID-19 is useful because it provides a better understanding of their resilience in the face of other types of commonly observed undesirable events that have a significant impact on food systems and their stakeholders – especially extreme climate events (drought, floods, natural disasters), economic or political crises (trade bans, economic crashes), etc. In the midst of the pandemic, AFA conducted a survey in the Asia region. In response to the question “What is the greatest risk you face?”, 94 per cent of respondents said “climate change” – well ahead of the COVID-19 crisis, which was only the second most common answer (76 per cent of respondents), tied with natural disasters. Many of the points raised here as ways to help FOs become more resilient to the health crisis may be transposed to the context of the climate crisis.

**Supporting FO monitoring systems.** Monitoring and early warning are considered a pillar of risk management strategies. Many FOs, particularly in West Africa, (particularly ROPPA, RBM and APESS) have engaged in activities for systematic observation and monitoring of the pandemic’s effects on grassroots communities. These regular surveys

were conducted using ongoing information gathering systems (focal points, peasant-farmer relays, etc.), which have two main objectives. One is internal to FOs and involves informing FOs themselves about their members' agricultural and food situation so that they can tailor their services to meet the needs of people at the grassroots level. The other is external and aimed at informing FO advocacy work and decision makers while influencing the latter and defending the interests of family farmers with a view to implementing agricultural policies and crisis response plans. In concrete terms, information gathering and processing is often time-consuming and requires substantial technical resources (these systems are increasingly digitalized) and human resources so that the information generated promptly reaches decision makers and supplements the information they already have. It is therefore important to support and strengthen these systems to ensure that they are responsive, effective and can adapt to different crises.

**Helping FOs become better able to manage crises.** The creativity of FOs and their ability to respond quickly showed how valuable they are. They are sometimes indispensable lifelines for farmers during crises, and yet, like most economic and social stakeholders, those interviewed had generally been unprepared for this type of situation. Aside from a few notable exceptions, such as CTOP in Togo, which drafted a "Global response plan to stop the spread of COVID-19," the FO response involved more urgent improvisation than any real adherence to a strategy. It would be useful to help FOs become more resilient to crises through training and experience-sharing and by preparing guides like the one Federation of Farmer Associations Promoting Family Agricultural Enterprise in Cambodia (FAEC) (an FO in Cambodia) produced for its members. Regarding financial aspects, as many FOs are now dependent on external grants, the crisis should spur them to consider diversifying their financial partners and increasing their own funds through member contributions, paid economic services and income-generating activities. In the short term, organizations in Asia are simply demanding more grants and access to funding (loans) to get through crises.

"1. Be ready to minimize or manage disruptions and financial consequences now and in the future. 2. Preserve the well-being of staff, volunteers, farmers, communities, donors, and other stakeholders. 3. Stay informed [...] 4. Spread the word: Share universally accepted advice on preventing and managing COVID-19. 5. Prepare to face financial consequences by creating a plan for managing unavoidable fixed costs by controlling cash flows, delaying spending where possible, and entering into "lean management" mode. 6. Fulfil any agreed commitments and use the time for managing donors [...] 7. Share challenges and actively seek support [...] 8. Determine finances and budget: [...] you should perhaps intensify fundraising efforts and draw on reserves. [...] 9. Jointly learn with your peers throughout the world: This difficult period offers a great opportunity to learn and develop as a national farmers' organization. Throughout the country, people are exchanging ideas, learning to band together and try new things, sharing their experiences and the lessons they have learned. There are so many things to learn: advice for leaders, staff, and so forth. [...]"

**Excerpt from  
the FAEC guide:  
advice for member  
FOs during the  
crisis**



**Cultivating versatility in FOs.** The crisis pulled FOs in all directions, and they were heavily called on by multiple sources. FOs had never before been called on or challenged as much in their multifaceted vocation. FOs have a combined economic, professional and social calling, or a calling geared mainly to defending the interests of farmers – often a union-focused calling to address more complex issues related to local or regional development policy and rural development. Most of them played a health-focused role, at the very least raising awareness among their members but sometimes forging partnerships with ministries of health or even filling in for state services. General, technical and union FOs were called on to address economic and marketing issues; economic FOs were called on to address social issues; FOs traditionally classified as development organizations provided humanitarian relief in the field. This crisis had an enormous impact on the usual roles of FOs and showed that in such a serious and unpredictable situation, people in rural areas need highly flexible, multifaceted organizations that can meet many different needs.



### **The crisis is a reminder of the importance of the social role of FOs**

**Maintaining and adapting the role of information provider.** FOs were highly active when it came to providing health information on how to prevent the disease, what to do if symptoms appeared and COVID-19 safety measures. These campaigns appear to have been effective, even in remote areas. It would be a good idea to keep them going in areas where the virus is still widely circulating. In areas where the infection is waning, these awareness initiatives could evolve toward dissemination of the innovations and best practices in hygiene and nutrition introduced during the crisis. Relationships built with the health authorities opened FOs up to a more holistic vision of food security, including concepts such as nutrition, hygiene and human health, which are important for increasing people's resilience to crises. It would be good for FOs to continue to develop those partnerships.

**Strengthening the connection between emergency relief and development.** Many FOs acted to provide emergency humanitarian relief during the crisis. For some, it was their first time doing so. Those actions were generally driven by demand from their most vulnerable members. It appears that FO partners were also able to influence the decision to commit to action for the distribution of food kits, animal feed and inputs. These measures would benefit from an assessment, as it would be useful for sharing experiences, capacity-building and improving future actions. There is a risk of undertaking such humanitarian activities too hastily and on an ad hoc basis, with no long-term perspective or vision. FOs are well-positioned to make such emergency relief activities part of a global strategy and longer-term actions. Concepts such as "graduation" and the gradual eradication of poverty developed in the field of social protection for food security may be used to inform FO discussions on supporting the most vulnerable parts of the population in a virtuous and productive cycle. The example of the action taken by CNCR in Senegal, which involved collecting part of its members' production to then redistribute it in the form of food aid, may also serve as inspiration for comprehensive FO discussions on their positioning between emergency relief and development.

**Helping FOs strengthen their targeting capacities.** The issue of targeting beneficiaries for such aid drove some FOs to develop guides and strategies and advise certain stakeholders (authorities, NGOs, donors) who were struggling to identify the most vulnerable people. With a view to continuing such actions, it would be interesting to further those strategic

processes, promote experience-sharing with emergency experts and train FO staff who express the need for training. In addition, some FOs are more accustomed than others to this type of emergency intervention – for example, in response to natural disasters – and could use their experience to benefit FOs in other regions.

**Supporting and strengthening formal and informal solidarity mechanisms within FOs.** Family farmers in poor countries regularly face crises and have always had endogenous solidarity mechanisms (tontines, solidarity funds, insurance, savings and loans associations, etc.) that help them cope with unexpected events. These community mechanisms play an important role in helping people become more resilient, complementing social protection systems that are still highly inadequate. However, they are not well understood by technical and financial partners and receive little support from them. It would be useful to encourage FOs to identify these mechanisms, analyse their strengths and weaknesses and develop plans to strengthen them.



### **The crisis is an opportunity for FOs to help their members become more resilient**

**Promoting agroecology.** During the crisis, agroecology clearly emerged as an approach that can help people become more resilient and family farmers to become more independent, particularly with respect to imported inputs. Although strategies to promote agroecology are popping up in many different countries, they are slow to be applied in the field. Most governments are still highly sceptical of the approach. More than ever, it is important to generalize these growing techniques, demonstrate their effectiveness and benefits, encourage experience-sharing and promote this project as an alternative to conventional farming, which has proven rather fragile in recent crises.

**Promoting diversification on farms.** The debate between farm specialization and diversification is acquiring new relevance. FOs have a role to play in helping farmers diversify their production to protect themselves from a shock in a particular value chain and in helping them develop highly nutritious food crops in addition to their cash crops. This approach encourages the maintenance and strengthening of “general FOs” alongside “value-chain FOs” that specialize in one particular product, and the strengthening of an approach for the development of territorial markets alongside projects for the development of value chains.

**Increasing storage capacity.** The crisis has shown how badly farmers are affected by disruptions downstream in value chains. Storage is the first line of defence for FOs during a crisis and is also useful for protecting farmers from price shocks. In FOs in Senegal and the Sahel, local storage (cereal banks, food security granaries) has long been a preferred solution for helping prevent crises. CNCR is now investing in a digital information system to track local food reserve levels in real time, in partnership with the national authorities in charge of preventing food crises. During the COVID-19 crisis, many FOs throughout the world have noted that they have insufficient storage capacity, owing to a lack of infrastructure and inadequate resources (security, electricity, etc.). For perishable goods, it is also important to invest in preservation and the cold chain (cold room, refrigerated transport). TFPs would benefit from strengthening their support for FO storage services and ensuring that those FOs are making a good contribution to national or regional storage policies (e.g. Economic Community of West African States’ [ECOWAS] Regional Reserve).

**Bolstering processing capacity.** Processing has multiple advantages. It increases the value of a given product, helps preserve it and can make it easier to store. Following the crisis, a number of FOs wished to develop their processing capacities and invest in a workshop. Some already have plans to seek funding to make those investments. Whether they are internalized in FOs or produced through a partnership with third-party organizations (a group of processors, for example), the crisis has shown that processing operations are critical for dealing with crises and must be intensified.

**Strengthening contractual arrangements.** A contractual arrangement between an FO and a buyer (processor, trader) has emerged as a strategy for resilience. Such arrangements guarantee outlets and prices for FOs in the event of disruptions in value chains. This approach should be further supported and built on. The inclusion of financial institutions in three-party models has been successful (see Senegal) and would benefit from dissemination and expansion.



### **The crisis is an opportunity to step up the promotion of local consumption**

**Promoting food sovereignty.** This is something FOs have long been fighting for. However, the fight has intensified in the crisis. It became apparent during the pandemic that, just as after the 2008 crisis, countries dependent on food imports are the most exposed and need help to become more independent. The idea is not to promote “food nationalism” or rigid protectionism but to diversify suppliers and strengthen, protect and utilize local resources as much as possible. Senegal’s decision to include CNCR in the discussions on a national food sovereignty programme after the crisis would benefit from being publicized and discussed among sub-Saharan FOs.

**Encouraging territory-based food systems.** To help people in rural areas become more resilient to future crises, FO partners should encourage the development of territorial food systems. Although the idea is not to completely abandon the long cash-crop value chains geared to export markets (which are a valuable source of income for many family farms) or long value chains for food staples, these value chains have shown how highly exposed they are to price fluctuations and all kinds of crises. In the wake of the 2008 and COVID-19 crises, development stakeholders are now asked to focus more on decentralized value chains for staple foods, short circuits and local markets in addition to these crops.

**Improving the quality of local products.** We have listed some of the initiatives that FOs launched during the crisis to make local products more attractive, increase their availability and make them more affordable, particularly for urban customers: seeking out old and local varieties adapted to specific locations and cultural preferences, diversifying supply and replacing imported products, improving the processing and packaging of local products, developing marketing innovations (direct sales, online sales, etc.). Such initiatives should be identified, assessed and supported. In many cities, there is demand for local products among urban consumers, but biases persist. An effort must be made to improve quality to improve the image of these products. TFPs would benefit from focusing more intensely on these issues and developing programmes to support FOs with a greater interest in boosting local consumption.



**Promoting short circuits.** Short circuits are marketing circuits with very few intermediaries between the farmer and the consumer. Generally situated in suburban areas, they include sales at the farm, sales at collective points of sale, sales at markets or fairs, online sales, sales to homes and sales to restaurateurs or traders. They have the advantage of creating a social bond between farmers and consumers that can be useful in tailoring supply to demand, promoting trust in the product, improving margins for farmers and reducing pollution linked to transport. Short circuits have developed significantly worldwide during the COVID-19 crisis. FOs have a role to play in organizing and facilitating these modes of marketing, especially through the sharing of practices, training, online platforms and labelling.

**Promoting and assessing online sales.** Online sales were tested by many FOs, but it would be interesting to assess those experiences. Feedback from the FOs that were interviewed was mostly positive. Online sales appear to be a real prospect, even though it seems that customers are still sort of a group of young urban “elites” who are users of social networks. In Mongolia, some of the advantages were highlighted: particularly, that sales are safer from a health standpoint if online sales include online payment, and that online sales make management easier.



### **The crisis is an opportunity to think about different ways of working in FOs**




**Reducing digital inequalities.** The development of NICTs during the crisis has undeniably been beneficial and has helped modernize FOs. All around the world, FOs have become more familiar with those tools and become better equipped. Multiple NICT uses have been discovered and tested in FOs: internal and external communication, observation and information gathering, marketing, advisory services, monitoring and evaluation. While NICTs sometimes used to be considered a fad, they are now taken more seriously by peasant-farmer leaders. The potential for these new technologies is considerable, provided they are accessible to as many people as possible. It is important to invest in providing smartphones and an internet connection to as many FO leaders and employees as possible, but it is also necessary to impress on the authorities the urgent need to ensure equal network coverage in all countries.

**Reviving associative life.** The development of remote working during the crisis undermined relations between FO members, disrupted the organization of statutory meetings and kept many activities on hold. Like all associations, FOs suffered considerably during this crisis, which prevented people from seeing one another face-to-face. Some FOs also went through a furlough period and had difficulty paying all their staff. In areas where the health situation has improved, it is important to quickly revive associative life by organizing village visits and general assemblies, resuming all kinds of exchanges and paying salary arrears.

**Reviving advisory services.** Advisory support services in FOs, exchange visits and training were hard hit by the crisis. Many organizations tried to use NICTs as a palliative and discovered their undeniable potential. However, the results do not appear to be convincing enough for the moment. Nearly all FO representatives are sceptical of remote training and advisory services as a substitute for an in-person service. It is therefore important to ensure that the more classical forms of experience-sharing (managerial advisory services, field schools, farmer-to-farmer advisory services, innovation platforms, etc.) resume and that further work on the relevant and complementary use of NICTs in that area is tested and discussed within FOs.

**Finding the right balance between remote and in-person work.** The crisis had an enormous impact on how FOs work. The rapid development of remote working has had a number of advantages. It has helped FOs save money on meetings and transport, while allowing for rapid communication and greater circulation of information. It has been a positive development, and there is a good chance it will continue even after the crisis. However, it is important to remain vigilant about the potential abuses of remote working. FOs would benefit from issuing rules on the use of teleconferences (limiting their number and length). Otherwise, there is a risk of keeping leaders far from the field and normalizing a form of intrusive surveillance. Moreover, all stakeholders agree that remote work must be combined with in-person work. NICTs should not replace in-person work but complement it.

## 5) Summary of lessons learned and recommendations

	FOs	TFPs	Authorities
<p><b>FO capacity-building in crisis prevention and management</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build capacity in health and climate <b>risk prevention and management</b></li> <li>• Capitalize on and share the experiences of FOs that have developed <b>strategies and guides for good practices</b> in the face of the crisis (FAEC, CNOP Togo)</li> <li>• Strengthen the leaders' capacity in <b>demand analysis, price volatility and contracting</b> to stabilize outlets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support <b>monitoring and alert systems</b> within FOs like those developed in West Africa by ROPPA, RBM, APSS (networks of informants among members, digitalized data collection system linked to the advisory system, processing and regular updating)</li> <li>• Support the <b>organizational strengthening</b> of FOs in parallel with project-oriented funding</li> <li>• Strengthen the FOs capacity in <b>risk analysis</b> and mitigation measures</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Strengthening the social mission of FOs</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, capitalize on and share FO initiatives that have <b>strengthened the link between emergency measures and long-term development dynamics</b>, such as the purchase of seeds from members for vulnerable populations (Senegal)</li> <li>• <b>Build capacity in humanitarian assistance:</b> aid distribution, targeting approaches, social protection and social transfers (exchange of experiences among FOs and with emergency NGOs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and <b>strengthen the formal and informal solidarity mechanisms</b> in FOs such as saving and loan associations, insurance, tontines and solidarity funds, which are little known and receive insufficient supported from TFPs</li> <li>• <b>Strengthen partnerships between FOs (particularly cooperatives) and humanitarian actors</b>, especially for the supply of food aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forge <b>partnerships with health authorities</b> in the areas of health, nutrition and hygiene</li> <li>• Recognize FOs as <b>strategic partners in social policies</b> and not just beneficiaries of aid</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strengthening members' resilience</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengthen the capacities of FO members</b> in food storage, processing and preservation to reduce post-harvest losses in the event of crisis</li> <li>• Forge <b>partnerships with crisis response actors</b>, strengthen the contribution of FOs to food aid mechanisms and national and regional storage policies</li> <li>• Promote <b>crop diversification and food self-sufficiency</b> through advisory approaches to producers</li> <li>• Build members' capacity in <b>organic input production, agroecology</b> and climate-change farming practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Continue and reinforce support for contracting</b> between FOs and the operators of downstream sectors</li> <li>• <b>Encourage and support generalist territorial FOs</b> that are better able to promote diversification and food crops</li> <li>• Strengthen the implementation of <b>agroecology-friendly programmes and policies</b></li> <li>• Strengthen the <b>contributions of FOs to national and regional storage policies</b></li> <li>• <b>Improve access to organic agricultural inputs</b></li> <li>• Create a <b>national livelihoods and resilience fund</b> (especially for women and youth)</li> <li>• Ensure that cereal banks, local stocks and village granaries are well-covered in at-risk areas</li> </ul>	

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### Promotion of local consumption

- Strengthen **advocacy for local consumption** and **food sovereignty** (protection of local resources)
  - Strengthen advocacy for FO access to institutional markets
  - **List and capitalize on FOs experiences** in the search for old and local varieties, diversification, the supply of alternatives to imported products, the quality of local products, greater appreciation of nutritious local foods, short circuits and online sales
  - Build members' capacity in respect to **standards and quality**, as well as the marketing and packaging of local products
- Promote and develop **local food projects** as a complement to industry projects
  - Include the **promotion of local consumption** in the guidelines
  - Encourage the development of **short circuits** through marketing support programmes for FOs, including, for example, on-farm sales, sales in a collective sales outlet, sales at markets or fairs, online sales, sales to homes and sales to restaurants or merchants
  - Strengthen investments in processing, storage and packaging **equipment**
- Develop programmes to **strengthen national food sovereignty** in collaboration with FOs
  - Encourage the **decentralization and relocation of food systems**
  - **Promote greater FO involvement** in national and regional **storage policies**
  - Give priority to local family farm products in **institutional purchases**
  - Support local **processing** industries and skills transfer
  - Strengthen **research** into plant material and invest in local **seed** production



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### Encouragement of rational digitalization of agricultural services

- **Resume in-person advice** in FOs
  - **Capitalize on e-learning experiences**
  - Seek a **new balance between telework and in-person work by establishing rules** for videoconferences
- **Equip FOs with digital tools** tailored to rural populations
  - **Strengthen the capacities of actors in the use of NICTs**
  - Forge partnerships with innovative companies and conduct pilot projects (ICT4D, e-consulting, e-commerce, solar, index insurance, etc.)
  - Negotiate with banks to create innovative digital financial products for family farmers
- **Improve network coverage in rural areas** and reduce the digital divide









- North Africa**
- RFO: Union Maghrébine et Nord-Africaine des Agriculteurs (UMNAGRI)
  - NFO: Fédération Mauritanienne de l'Agriculture (FMA), Mauritania
- West Africa**
- RFO: Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA)
  - NFO: Coordination Togolaise des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs Agricoles (CTOP), Togo
  - NFO: Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP Mali), Mali
  - NFO: Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux (CNCR), Senegal
  - LFO: Conseil Régional des Unions du Sahel (CRUS), Burkina Faso
- East Africa**
- RFO: Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF)
  - NFO: Ugandan National Farmers Federation (UNFF), Uganda
  - LFO: Uganda National Apiculture Development Organisation (TUNADO), Uganda
  - NFO: IMBARAGA, Rwanda
  - NFO: Confédération des Associations des Producteurs Agricoles pour le Développement (CAPAD), Burundi
- Central Africa**
- RFO: Plateforme Régionale des Organisations Paysannes de l'Afrique Centrale (PROPAC)
  - NFO: Confédération Paysanne du Congo (COPACO-PRP), Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Southern Africa**
- NFO: SOA Network; Madagascar
  - LFO: Union des Coopératives Laitières (ROFAMA), Madagascar
- Pacific**
- RFO: Pacific Islands Farmers Organisation Network (PIFON)
  - LFO: Beekeepers Association, Fiji
- Caribbean**
- LFO: Réseau des Coopératives Caféières de la Région Nord (RECOCARNO) through AFDI, Haiti
  - LFO: Asociación Agrícola Noroestana (ASOANOR), Dominican Republic
  - LFO: Bananos Ecológicos de la Línea Noroeste (BANELINO), Dominican Republic
- Latin America**
- RFO: Confederación de Organizaciones de Productores Familiares del Mercosur Ampliado (COPROFAM)
  - NFO: Movimiento Unitario Campesino y Etnias de Chile (MUCECH), Chile
  - NFO: Coordinadora de Integración de Organizaciones Económicas Campesinas (CIOEC), Bolivia
  - NFO: Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores Rurais Agricultores e Agricultoras Familiares (CONTAG), Brazil
  - NFO: Comisión Nacional de Fomento Rural (CNFR), Uruguay
- Europe**
- LFO: Federation of Farmers in Moldova, (FARM), Moldova
- Asia**
- RFO: Asian Farmers' Association (AFA)
  - NFO: Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA), India
  - NFO: Lao Farmers' Network (LFN), Lao People's Democratic Republic
  - NFO: National Association of Mongolian Agricultural Cooperatives (NAMAC), Mongolia

# West Africa

## Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA)



### Perception of the crisis

ROPPA has done a great deal of work on COVID-19, conducting multiple studies and working with RBM and APESS to engage with regional authorities. Its participation has been heavily requested by regional authorities and donors.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

It is interesting to see the new working methods that were developed. The crisis served as an opportunity to develop new ways of communicating. The network held virtual board meetings, carried out communication campaigns with local radio, organized Zoom meetings and Facebook Live sessions and created WhatsApp groups with the board of directors. While there is a greater flow of information, there are major concerns about connectivity and abuses in the use of teleconferences. The new priorities have become “security” and “COVID-19”. ROPPA has rolled out a strategy for informing FOs about the states’ policy measures with respect to the “response plan.”



### Impact of the crisis on services

The restrictions did not have much of a local impact. FOs were often able to continue working. ROPPA created new services, including helping member FOs respond to calls after COVID-19. There was considerable aid in connection with this pandemic. ROPPA became nearly a cashpoint for FOs. It obtained emergency aid, particularly through SAFE 2020, and directed it toward cooperatives of women and young people who encountered marketing problems. It produced guides to help member FOs with targeting. Many FO partners relied on those FOs for questions related to targeting. Concerning the link between emergency work and development work, some FO experiences were very interesting, among them the one in Senegal, where seeds were purchased from members for redistribution to people in vulnerable situations. It would be useful to assess what was achieved in terms of emergency aid to show that FOs are as well-positioned as NGOs to distribute aid.



## Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

ROPPA worked very hard to persuade technical and financial partners to support FOs during the crisis. It waged an advocacy campaign targeting GAFSP, which led to an ambitious new call for projects. Another advocacy campaign targeted the French Committee for International Solidarity (CFSI). ROPPA also negotiated with regional banks (BOAD, BIDC) to defer the repayment of agricultural loans. It took action with the African Rural and Agricultural Association (AFRACA) to relieve the pressure on microfinance institutions (MFI), which had very low repayment rates (Niger, Benin, Burkina Faso, Nigeria). Finally, with the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), ECOWAS, and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), ROPPA focused on the sale of rice, whose value chain was disrupted by customs restrictions and trade policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Member FOs were often included in states' response plans. The crisis provided a new reason to promote local consumption, but ROPPA had already been addressing that issue beforehand. That did not prevent certain States and institutions from taking advantage of the situation to disregard the usual discussions.



## Outlook

The Monitoring and Action Committee (MAC) is an initiative that is intended to last. Innovations included initiatives providing access to funding for family farms (CTOP) and the development of virtual tools. E-commerce has grown during the crisis. Farmers used to be sceptical but are now very interested in selling online. Online advisory services apply mainly to young people.



# Senegal

## Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux (CNCR)



### Perception of the crisis

CNCR views the pandemic as both a one-off and a structural crisis. It was an opportunity to strengthen initiatives for anticipating and managing crises and to implement strategies for resilience.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

CNCR did not welcome any new members during the crisis. It could not hold certain statutory meetings. It held its board meetings remotely during the worst of the crisis. CNCR made frequent use of digital tools for internal communication through Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Internet connection is becoming more widely available in Senegal (and more affordable), and more and more farmers have smartphones. Information on the pandemic and COVID-19 safety measures was broadcast in rural radio programmes organized by CNCR and translated into local languages.



### Impact of the crisis on services

The crisis has shown that CNCR members are highly exposed to market-related risks. CNCR therefore wanted to expand the contracting model it is developing in the groundnut value chain with industrial firms and banks. The model has been confirmed to be useful. CNCR also developed income-generating activities for its members that were in difficulty, promoting small-scale livestock farming with short-cycle animals and improved traditional poultry and family sheep farming. Furthermore, in response to the difficulties involved in importing potatoes, CNCR decided to invest in a value chain for seeds.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

The biggest disruption in CNCR's services was in advisory services and training due to movement restrictions and limits on gatherings. As for emergency measures, CNCR organized a group purchase of rice and groundnuts from members for redistribution to people in need. The idea was to show the state that in a crisis, FOs are there to address needs and are a local alternative to organizations such as the WFP, which are relatively distanced from farmers. The SAFE 2020 project provided small livestock (chickens, ewes) for vulnerable women and young people during the time when markets were closed. In order to identify the most vulnerable people, CNCR made an initial selection and then put its member FOs and specialized colleges (such as the youth college and women's college) in charge.



## **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

CNCR and the Senegalese government maintained a constructive relationship in dealing with the crisis. For the first time ever, the government has mentioned launching a food sovereignty programme. A draft document is currently being discussed with CNCR. Likewise, a large-scale project to support family farming is currently being developed in partnership with the government in response to the GAFSP call for projects. CNCR conducted an internal survey on the impact of COVID-19 in association with advisors (participating in the observatory) to inform its advocacy work.



## **Outlook**

The crisis showed that contracting needed to be developed. FOs also need strengthening in the areas of storage, processing and preservation to avoid post-harvest losses in the event of a crisis. Cereal banks and local farmer food reserves also need strengthening and should be integrated into crisis response initiatives. CNCR is currently looking to track farmer food reserve levels in real time using digital tools. The situation in Senegal is one of perpetual crisis.

# Togo

## Coordination Togolaise des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles (CTOP)



### Perception of the crisis

For CTOP, the crisis was a structural shock – an unprecedented situation marked curfews and movement restrictions. The consequences were quickly felt in the countryside: difficulty procuring inputs, finding labour, selling goods (market gardening, animal products). CTOP came up with a response plan to address the situation. The most vulnerable people were the most heavily affected.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

CTOP noted a revival of interest among existing members and welcomed new members. Members stayed in touch through various WhatsApp groups: one group was created for FOs, a second for presidents and a third for technicians. For the first time ever, elected representatives and technicians organized virtual Zoom meetings. Leaders and technicians were trained in the use of NICTs. Developing NICTs can generate savings but can also be time-consuming. Staff are now perfectly capable of conducting meetings over Zoom. The rounds are now resuming. Agents from the Ministry of Health are working with CTOP in the field to raise awareness among segments of the population not covered by its activities. CTOP has set up a network of focal points up to the municipal level to improve communication in certain areas (agricultural growth poles): information on the crop year is entered and digitized (using tablets) in areas with access to internet connection.



### Impact of the crisis on emergency services and measures

Advisory services were severely disrupted by restrictions on gatherings. CTOP tested mobile phone advisory services and established a partnership with the AccessAgriculture NGO for online training (videos). The idea is to make short video clips (just a few minutes each) to highlight best practices for preserving foods, combating cochineal, using seeds, etc. The difficulty lies in downloading the videos and translating them into local languages. It will not work in remote regions without internet or smartphones. Digital advisory services are a good way to complement in-person advisory services but are no substitute for them. The best method is to project the video under the parley tree and then discuss it with the farmers. With regard to emergency aid, CTOP distributed seed kits to 200 vulnerable women with the help of the SAFE 2020 project. Targeting tools were developed in partnership with local authorities and the Ministry of Health.



## Impact of the crisis on economic life

The crisis has sparked new debates: on marketing (particularly e-commerce), funding, transhumance and conflicts between crop and livestock farmers. CTOP has set up an electronic marketing platform. Dealing with the consequences of COVID-19 has in itself become an area of focus. A study of four value chains was conducted and gave rise to a note for decision makers. New economic partnerships were forged, and an agreement was established between a university hospital and a market-gardening FO (FENOMAT). Another agreement between a poultry-farmers' FO and frozen chicken importers was also established. Funding was negotiated with the German Agency for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, or GIZ) to acquire tricycles for making home deliveries. CTOP promoted its members' products (guides) and wanted to set up kiosks in Lomé to sell cereals from the Togo Cereal Producers' Network (Centrale des Producteurs de Céréales, or CPC) to limit the use of intermediaries. CTOP also created a framework for dialogue between FOs and MFIs. The idea was to help 350 cooperatives develop a business plan. Fifty of them ended up signing contracts with MFIs.



## Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

CTOP was not very involved in developing the national emergency plan. Advocacy to obtain a zero per cent interest loan for members and public procurement of production from member FOs were unsuccessful. Notes were sent to decision makers to report problems importing fertilizer, poultry, veterinary products and day-old chicks. CTOP pointed out the need for Togo to become more food self-sufficient (local market-gardening seeds), but the authorities do not seem to want to amend the current policy, which is favourable to importers. The previous government had wanted to limit fish and frozen chicken imports, but that policy was halted. Likewise, regarding the national agroecology strategy, the text exists, but the government mentions only chemical fertilizers. Partners (FAO, CARE, IFAD, etc.) appear willing to assist FOs during the crisis through new funding lines and flexibility with reports.



## Outlook

This crisis has shown that the consequences of a new international supply crisis would be catastrophic. Togo needs to bolster its domestic resources. The crisis has also buttressed the case for family farming. Through the crisis, CTOP was able to increase its legitimacy and innovate (emergency aid, new technologies). In the near future, it plans to develop a "CTOP" label, e-commerce and farmer shops.



# Mali

## Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP Mali)



### Perception of the crisis

The crisis created a major problem for inputs, as most are brought in from outside. Fertilizer and pesticide shortages affected the cotton value chain in particular. There was a great deal of concern about yields and the consequences for income.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

The disease primarily affected cities and had a less of an impact on the countryside. CNOP engaged in a great deal of communication, trained peasant-farmer relays, entered into contracts with local radio stations and distributed health kits to villages.



### Impact of the crisis on social services and measures

Activities were able to continue at the grassroots level. Advisory services were offered and the COVID-19 pandemic did not hinder this. Certain tasks were delegated to peasant-farmer coordinators. CNOP continued and intensified its agroecology activities, particularly those targeting young people, to prepare for climate change. With regard to humanitarian assistance, many NGOs used FOs to target people in need, and some FOs began engaging in humanitarian work.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

Economic problems primarily involved the sale of perishable goods. There were heavy losses because local buyers and importers did not come. In certain areas, NGOs helped FOs process potatoes and tomatoes into concentrate.



### Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

Since CNOP has no health specialists, it worked with the Ministry of Health. Relations are now closer and may remain so once the crisis has ended – perhaps in terms of its monitoring role (which the authorities appreciate) and the concept of nutrition (which is gaining traction, particularly among young people). It also engaged in advocacy to increase grants for inputs: fertilizers, seeds, fungicides, pesticides. There was also strong collaboration between NGOs, FOs and the state in Mali's countryside. There are consortia, and coordination efforts are under way to purchase foods and inputs while targeting municipalities and the poorest members of society.



## Outlook

The crisis revived FO interest in processing (particularly vegetables) with two objectives: preserving foods and adding value to them. Agroecology also progressed during the crisis. Farmers realized that compost could replace imported fertilizers and that agroecology could generate substantial savings. The Malian Company for Textile Development (Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles, or CMDT) asked CNOP to train cotton growers in agroecology. The concept of hygiene also gained traction during the crisis. Farmers are paying more attention to cleanliness, and COVID-19 and information campaigns have helped drive that awareness. Finally, there is debate on humanitarian activities: “The role of our FOs is to carry out structural activities over the long term, but we think it might be a good idea to pair those activities with one-off emergency operations, especially during crises.”

# Burkina Faso

## Conseil Régional des Unions du Sahel (CRUS)



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

The COVID-19 crisis had a serious impact on CRUS. Burkinabe livestock farmers have had to deal with a series of crises in the Sahel and have become an at-risk population. COVID-19 has only amplified this phenomenon. CRUS considerably expanded its activities in response to its members' needs during the pandemic and helped make up for the fact that humanitarian NGOs were having trouble accessing conflict zones. These additional activities resulted in profound changes within the organization. The number of people employed by CRUS rose from 18 before the crisis to 73 after it. The FO has become much more visible in the eyes of livestock farmers and more legitimate in the eyes of the authorities.



### Impact of the crisis on services and humanitarian assistance

With regard to emergency aid, the board of directors decided to reorient activities to focus more on livestock farmers living in the most isolated areas and carried out the following operations: distribution of livestock feed free or at reduced prices, distribution of goats and sheep to vulnerable women, a vaccination campaign, distribution of cattle to certain households, distribution of seeds to mixed crop and livestock farmers. CRUS is not usually so involved in humanitarian work and had to change its targeting methods and train itself in the individual household economy approach.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

In terms of monitoring, the organization significantly increased the number of its relays in the field for gathering data (from 133 to 400) and nearly every week communicated data (via WhatsApp) from RBM's monitoring system on the livestock and cereal markets, herd movements, numbers admitted to health centres, effectiveness of awareness campaigns, etc. As for marketing, the following activities were carried out: animals were purchased from vulnerable livestock farmers and resold to traders or buyers in cities; agreements were signed to supply milk and meat to mining companies (to prevent many young milk collectors from becoming jobless); a value chain was developed for the sale of vacuum-packed meat.



### Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

Livestock farmers' organizations played a key role in assisting people during the pandemic, boosting their visibility, importance and credibility in the eyes of national and local authorities (that formerly had a poor opinion of them). However, there is not necessarily greater consideration of CRUS's observations (for example, the advocacy campaign to lift the ban on growing tall plants did not result in any action). CRUS has also conducted advocacy campaigns on the following issues: aid to the pastoral livestock farming sector, and the suspension of taxes on the sale of animals for a few months once markets reopen.



## Outlook

Livestock farmers' organizations played a key role in assisting people during the pandemic, boosting their visibility, importance and credibility in the eyes of national and local authorities. This also led to discussions on the necessary complementarity between humanitarian assistance and medium- and long-term development in crisis zones. Cross-border cooperation needs to be strengthened to avoid border closures (see Benin, Ghana), which have a serious impact on the economies of countries in the Sahel and create conflicts by blocking normal transhumance movements. Livestock-farmer FOs need to be more engaged in improving the legislative framework for transhumance.



# East Africa

## Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF)



### Perception of the crisis

The crisis heavily impacted EAFF. It is not time-bound, has an impact on international trade and is a serious problem for food-deficit countries, such as Kenya. There is no insurance for farmers who are no longer able to sell their goods. There are also implications for tax collection and unemployment. Everything becomes more expensive.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

Associative life slowed during the crisis. The number of members stagnated, and the contributions received by FOs declined because of the decrease in agricultural income. Governance-body meetings were held less frequently. Finally, EAFF member FOs were affected by dwindling budgets. Notwithstanding, COVID-19 also helped to revive solidarity among members. Remote communication were adopted, for instance via Zoom. Although internet connection and equipment are often obstacles, FO leaders still largely embraced the use of NICTs. "There were advantages to remote working, but it shouldn't be overdone. We are on Zoom all the time now. It feels like we are constantly being evaluated, and the logical frameworks haven't changed. We have to scan documents to justify activities, and it's cumbersome."



### Impact of the crisis on social services and measures

The lockdown and movement restrictions slowed down advisory services to farmers, as well as all programmes. "Even the e-Granary platform was affected because it requires a lot of physical contact. We changed the model for providing services. Before, we went out in the field a lot. Now we delegate more at national level. We provided national-level staff with tablets so that they could send us information. We use the digital platform, which ensures high-quality monitoring."

"With IFAD and the SAFE 2020 programme, we distributed inputs to vulnerable members of the population. Other aid was made available during the crisis, particularly a COVID-19 fund from the World Bank. Through e-Granary, we are also trying to work on the question of social insurance."



### **Impact of the crisis on economic life**

The e-Granary platform facilitates communication between members and their partners. It is used in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. Information on COVID-19 and other topics of interest to farmers is circulated on the platform. At the macroeconomic level, the crisis gave rise to a form of “food nationalism,” which, on the one hand, is very damaging for a country like Kenya, which is the region’s biggest importer. However, on the other hand, the crisis led to greater storage and helped stimulate local value chains. It was noted that millet had partially been replaced by maize. The challenge will be to ensure that this becomes firmly rooted over time. The risk is that everything will return to the way it was before the pandemic.



### **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

The crisis was also an opportunity to pursue a dialogue with the authorities, particularly in Uganda, Burundi, Congo and even Kenya. New interest in FOs was noted. FOs are used by the authorities as a vehicle for combating the effects of COVID-19. To raise awareness, the state turned to established stakeholders for discussion. EAFF conducted advocacy campaigns to facilitate movement between countries, and on the issue of taxation in agriculture.



### **Outlook**

The FOs had to become experts in communication. Digital platforms became very important, among which e-Granary. The way projects were carried out changed, with more human resources, closer relationships with leadership, and more monitoring. With regard to outlook, there is a need to strengthen trade within Africa and break down the barrier between East Africa and West Africa. EAFF realizes the importance of investing in processing and agroecological systems. EAFF’s farmers’ cooperatives also need to assume a greater market share in the countries of the region and scale up.

# Uganda

## Ugandan National Farmers' Federation (UNFF)



### Perception of the crisis

The FO was heavily impacted, as 90 per cent of its work is usually done in the field (services, training, etc.). The crisis also had an impact on funding, as UNFF's biggest source of internal funding is the annual agricultural fair, which could not be held for the past two years (no gatherings authorized). The crisis affected everyone in all regions, substantially restricting movement throughout the country and limiting UNFF's ability to provide the services it is supposed to provide. Climate change has caused many droughts in several regions but has not kept the FO from taking action.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

"There was a decline in the number of new members, because we had less of a presence in the field. Payment of contributions was also down this year. Before COVID-19, we were already working on an NICT tool, called ICT4Farmers, to allow us to communicate more easily with farmers. COVID-19 considerably increased the need for such a tool, as all meetings had to be held remotely. It's not easy, because many of our members are in regions where the network quality is very bad. We used phone calls and text messages a lot. We have a call centre ("membership desk") at bureau level, dedicated to answering members' questions. With COVID-19, we increased the staff within that department from two to four people in order to be able to step up remote monitoring (mainly by phone), and we invested in more equipment."



### Impact of the crisis on services

The most affected service in all the value chains UNFF works in was training for members, especially since online training does not really work for all farmers because of network problems in particular. "We need to work to improve the capacities of our members when it comes to using ICT for training. We are able to work remotely with our member FOs just fine, but the problem is passing that knowledge and training on to farmers. But at the same time, working remotely has also allowed us to reduce the costs of physical meetings, particularly with our partners (tickets, hotels, etc.)."



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

The ICT4Farmers tool is used for marketing agricultural products and sharing information about markets. One of the economic services the FO charges for is the connection between farmers and certain service providers. Greater use of ICT can lead to new sources of income while offering more services for members, particularly connecting them with other stakeholders (financial institutions, insurance companies, etc.).



## Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

“Our relations with the national authorities are even better than before the crisis, because the government needed to work with organizations based in the field in order to provide services. We are on the verge of obtaining direct financial support from the government, which we have never obtained before. The crisis was an opportunity to develop new arguments and persuade the government to work more closely with FOs that are already established and structured. We signed four MOU with partners, including governmental partners. Several of our partners can no longer operate directly in the field because of their internal COVID-19 policies. We, on the other hand, have the right to go in the field. So those partners transferred some of their technical work to us, along with the corresponding budget. In a way, those big international NGOs left us FOs all the technical work and all the work in the field.”



## Outlook

“In the future, we must boost the capacities of grassroots members in the use of ICT. This is essential in order to be able to successfully carry out training and extension activities in the field. Network quality is bad in many areas, but the crisis also helped the national authorities and ICT companies realise that the network quality needs to be improved. While waiting for the situation to improve, we are resorting to other solutions (phone calls, text messaging). Boosting our capacity to work from home is an important achievement that will last beyond the crisis, as it generates big savings. Another important lesson from the crisis is that as an FO, we must secure our sources of income. We were not at all prepared for this crisis, and it has severely affected us.”



# Uganda

## National Organization for the development of Apiculture in Uganda (TUNADO)



### Perception of the crisis

The crisis led to fewer sales of products and services and therefore a major loss of income for TUNADO. For example, it was unable to organize the annual honey week, which generated several millions of Ugandan shillings, for two years in a row. The crisis also slowed activities carried out by members and through partnerships because of shop closures, movement restrictions and disruptions in the supply chains for beekeeping products.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

Most members were unable to pay their annual contribution, and the number of organization members fell from 84,213 to 82,300. Members involved in processing and packaging were more affected than farmers because of the supply shortage, shop closures and lack of funding.

“We made greater use of available communication channels (such as social media, text messaging, radio, television, information bulletins and virtual communication) and taught our members how to use them. Among other things, we conducted online campaigns on the use of bee products as stimulants for the immune system to help prevent COVID-19 and used short video clips on social media and television to promote online shopping for bee products as an alternative to buying them in shops.” Most of the work is now done digitally. The reduction in meeting costs by over 80 per cent was a very positive result.



### Impact of the crisis on services

TUNADO provided means of transport (such as a pickup truck) to help producers transport their bee products from collection centres to the “World of Bees” shop where they are sold; provided motorbikes for extension staff; paid an advance to processors; and produced “DIY” video training guides and a manual on how to use tools such as Zoom and Teams. Advisory services were strengthened through the use of the FarmerLink mobile-phone app for data collection. For advisory services, TUNADO also adopted remote solutions, such as recorded digital training, virtual meetings, radio broadcasts, etc. It also launched training on the use of online marketing, webinars for meetings, group marketing and labelling for bee products. It will continue to use and develop ICT in extension services. A combination of in-person and remote work at the secretariat level will also continue, even though most members cannot afford the high cost of internet and the internet connection is generally not very good.



### **Impact of the crisis on economic life**

The closure of shops where processors' products were sold had an impact on the sale of bee products, which drove World of Bees to shift from one point of sale to four points of sale and to create an online shop. The organization is also building a multipurpose complex that will offer warehousing services, a mini laboratory and a processing facility. It also purchased motorbikes, which are used to deliver bee products door-to-door and facilitate collection. The recent stoppage sparked debate on the best way to support members who are in difficulty owing to the pandemic. Since financial institutions appear to be reluctant to fund beekeeping, it was agreed that an investment fund offering members favourable borrowing terms should be created.



### **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

The organization began using the farmer advisory consultation tool (FACT) as one of its lobbying and advocacy tools. Most of the advocacy work focused on protecting bees, as certain bee products were being investigated as medical treatments for people infected with COVID-19.



### **Outlook**

The main innovations were the creation of a fund for beekeeping businesses to offer loans for securing the supply chain, the introduction of applications (Kucheza, Sevi, etc.) for better data collection, and the introduction of online purchases on the World of Bees website. To strengthen the organization, it is important to finalize the construction of the storage and processing building, expand the beekeeping investment fund (in order to serve more members), strengthen and generalize the use of NICTs and improve transport services for the collection and delivery of bee products.

# Rwanda

## IMBARAGA



### Perception of the crisis

“The crisis forced us to stay at home. What makes this crisis unique is the general fear it has provoked and the uncertainty regarding what to do to prevent contagion. The consequences will be long-lasting. There were bankruptcies, and the country’s economy will take a long time to recover.”



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

Fewer meetings were planned and there was less training and experience-sharing. Many meetings with economic partners and authorities had to be cancelled. General assemblies and board meetings could not be held as planned, but bureau meetings continued. All services were reduced because of the lockdowns. “We fell far behind schedule in advisory and demonstration services. Associative life suffered as a result of those delays. We have noted a shift toward withdrawal. We led an advocacy campaign so that technicians could go out in the field. Those most affected were the poorest members of the population, people with only a small amount of land, and people who are obliged to engage in other activities to provide for themselves (small-scale business, labour). With regard to administrative issues, remote working also simplified procedures: for instance, signing papers is faster. The COVID-19 crisis has also favoured the emergence of young people in the FO, because they are the ones who know how to use NICT (mobilization of young people), and the renewal of leaders.”



### Impact of the crisis on services

“In terms of organization, we had to innovate and use megaphones in villages to keep our distances. We also used WhatsApp groups, radio and television. New technologies are unequal: They require having at least one telephone, or even a smartphone, which is far from the norm. But they can also generate big savings and save time in terms of transport. We also developed campaigns for agricultural extension services and nutrition. But because of the crisis, we were able to perform only 50 per cent of the activities that we had planned. To be able to carry out those activities, we became much more decentralized and encouraged volunteering, particularly for young people. Some of our partners agreed to postpone activities, while others eliminated our budgets for non-withdrawal. We also had delays for grant payments. Emergency aid was also distributed, but on a small scale (protection kits and food kits).”



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

During the lockdown, it was hard to access inputs and hard to sell. Agricultural prices fell, and some chicken farmers gave up because there weren’t enough buyers. IMBARAGA suffered heavy losses in potatoes, onions, chickens, pigs, etc. COVID-19 made people realize the need to develop preservation and processing in the future. Thanks to e-Granary, the FO developed online sales for rice and maize and entered into a contract with a new processing facility in the east. In Rwanda, it tried to give a boost to local consumption through “Made in Rwanda”.



## **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

COVID-19 also had a positive impact on advocacy for the status of peasant farmers. People were posing as farmers to obtain authorization to move around. This helped the authorities realize the importance of raising the agricultural status. Advocacy campaigns were also carried out to expand travel permission to include trucks. During the crisis, the national banks set limits on withdrawals, which impeded transactions, particularly for purchases of inputs. IMBARAGA also engaged in advocacy to lift the withdrawal limit. FOs gained new legitimacy among farmers by relaying demands concerning access to inputs, permission to move around, etc. The government listened to IMBARAGA's demands and made sure that inputs reached villages.



## **Outlook**

The main innovations were the use of megaphones for advisory services, online meetings, simplification of procedures (online document signing) and a shift toward preservation and processing. The decision was also made to purchase inputs earlier in the future and to develop the use of telephones and radios. With regard to outlook, there is a need for efforts to develop self-funding, strengthen partnerships among FOs and with civil society and build the capacities of elected district representatives.

# Burundi

## Confédération des associations des producteurs agricoles pour le développement (CAPAD)



### Perception of the crisis

The crisis was a structural shock that resulted in a decline in partnerships, activities, meetings and technical support, as well as a decrease in the association's budget. The effects will be felt over the long term. The number of COVID-19 cases in Burundi is on the rise; previously, the disease affected only cities, but now it has hit the countryside.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

Activities in the field slowed, as did the number of meetings scheduled. WhatsApp groups were created for leaders who had a smartphone (roughly 40 per cent of members). COVID-19 communication campaigns were conducted and activities reoriented (fairs, farmer forum, etc.) toward offering support for seeds.



### Impact of the crisis on social services and measures

Aid was increased to those most in need. The cooperatives have solidarity mechanisms (tontines), and a solidarity fund was also set up. Some cooperatives worked with WFP to supply school cafeterias. This was a pilot project with a small number of schools.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

Growing crops with a short planting-to-harvest cycle (e.g. vegetables, onions, courgettes, etc.) was encouraged around cities. CAPAD began distributing seeds, because the panic had driven farmers to sell their harvest in a hurry. Its seed-related activities were previously limited to providing information and negotiating with research institutes. CAPAD favours varieties that offer high-quality nutrition (potato, bean) to cope with situations of food insecurity.

In addition, some member cooperatives sell to SOCOPA, which is a marketing entity linked to CAPAD. This year, however, there was not enough product. Collection was difficult because cooperative members sold elsewhere in a rush. SOCOPA negotiated with financial institutions to mobilize loans for inputs.





## **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

The political situation is not very favourable to FOs at the moment. Government measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were not discussed with them.



## **Outlook**

The main innovations during the crisis were the introduction of vitamin-rich varieties, the strengthening of mutual assistance and support for agroecological practices (distribution of technological packages to ensure autonomy for family farms). It is important to increase the autonomy of farms and CAPAD for future crises.

# Central Africa

## Plateforme Régionale des Organisations Paysannes d'Afrique Centrale (PROPAC)



### Perception of the crisis

The difference between this and other crises lies in the media hype and general panic that the disease has caused. The WHO predicted a disaster for Africa, but in the end, COVID-19 claimed no more victims than malaria in Central Africa.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

The crisis was an opportunity for renewed exchange and solidarity among member FOs, and for sending supportive messages. All leaders and staff learned to use new technologies and work from home, as it was no longer possible to conduct missions in the field. PROPAC had to acquire the right equipment and improve its internet connection but suffered from the loss of human contact. NICTs were used in particular for monitoring and evaluation work: PROPAC designed a form and sent it to grassroots organizations to complete the logical framework with data on the economic initiatives of FOs. The general assembly had to be postponed due to the inability to gather. The next meeting will be elective. PROPAC launched a campaign to raise awareness among farmers about the pandemic and distributed protection kits. There was no new guidance for the organization. PROPAC stayed on the same path, and its main focus was to avoid succumbing to panic.



### Impact of the crisis on services and social measures

Advisory services were heavily affected by the crisis. Each PROPAC member FO has local support staff, but their movements were restricted. Advisory support is slowly picking up again, but not in all countries (e.g. Gabon). PROPAC also provided emergency aid through the SAFE 2020 project. Targeting was based on a previous project conducted with the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (Centre Technique de Coopération Agricole et Rurale, or CTA): around 10 cooperatives were chosen. The aid was for working capital and inputs, but the amount was highly insufficient to meet all needs.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

The crisis did not have much of an impact from an organizational standpoint, but FOs had to change their planning for certain activities (marketing at the grassroots level). Two online platforms were created: one for electronic monitoring and evaluation, and the other for intermediation between farmers and buyers, agricultural advisory services, and other activities. This is a management information systems project in the pilot phase in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



## **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

PROPAC is in discussions with CEEAC, and a mission has been planned to learn more about governance and renew the agreement. A study was conducted on the impact of COVID-19 in Central Africa, along with other national studies. These studies contributed to advocacy work. New partnerships were forged, particularly with PAFO.



## **Outlook**

The main innovation was remote working, which has advantages and disadvantages. Supervisory missions are less effective than before. One lesson learned from the crisis is to never succumb to panic. The crisis was terrifying, according to the media, but people in Central Africa were used to living with other diseases, such as malaria. It is important to stay calm and not focus on the disease, because other issues are more important. For people who do become ill, the region also has excellent traditional medicines.

# Democratic Republic of the Congo

## Confédération Paysanne du Congo – Principal Regroupement des Paysans (COPACO-PRP)



### Perception of the crisis

FO members of COPACO-PRP have been seriously impacted by COVID-19 since the first case was announced in March 2020. Agricultural activities, food-processing businesses and retail outlets are considered essential in many provinces, but movement restrictions risk creating a shortage of agricultural labourers. This crisis is unique, particularly because of persistent scepticism among the population regarding the disease, confusing it with the flu or malaria and thus, considering it a disease that can be cured using local products without the need for modern medicine. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, several epidemics have hit peasant farmers, including Ebola since 1977. Some provinces that have fallen victim to the pandemic have already gained experience managing similar calamities. Market gardeners fared better than farmers growing subsistence crops.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

During lockdown, the activities in COPACO-PRP organizations slowed down at all levels. The suspension of meetings with over 20 people, movement restrictions, internal and external border closures and market closures did not favour cohesion among members. Member FOs had a great deal of difficulty communicating with one another and with partners. The telephone was the only way to ensure communication through social networks. Communication with external partners was handled through remote working, primarily via Zoom, WhatsApp and other social networks.



### Impact of the crisis on emergency services and measures

The pandemic had no particular influence on advisory services for farmers, but as Kinshasa was the epicentre of the disease, travellers from outside the capital were not welcome in other areas for fear of spreading the disease. COPACO-PRP was able to continue to support farmers in their land disputes through Village de Justice Paysanne.

FOs received support in the form of agricultural inputs and health kits for COVID-19, and four FOs launched small, profitable economic initiatives in the agricultural sector. To address all the difficulties encountered in managing the epidemic, COPACO-PRP revived the Solidarité Médicale Paysanne mutual health insurance system. COPACO-PRP would also like to follow through on the plans for a farmers' bank by launching the Mutuelle Financière Paysanne. The bank will help small farmers save money and obtain small, low-interest loans.



## Impact of the crisis on economic life

New partnerships were forged to help local FOs deal with the epidemic. Unlike other partnerships, this time there was support for production and the development of other agricultural value chains. Certain value chains were strengthened, among them cowpea, beans in production zones and extension services for new growing methods for bringing production to markets in neighbouring areas. Farmers began to grow new crops. For example, pineapple producers in Bukanga-Lonzo decided to start producing groundnut, cowpeas and beans, which are crops with a short planting-to-harvest cycle that can cover certain needs. COPACO-PRP revitalized the various grassroots units of the Farmers' Agricultural Fund (Caisse Agricole Paysanne).



## Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

During this period, COPACO-PRP was approached by several local authorities and state services. A partnership was signed with the National Seed Service (Service National de Semences) that offered training in seed technology for 15 trainers in charge of instructing other trainers. That partnership will provide COPACO-PRP with a rural radio station and a seed laboratory. However, the management of crop years is still a major difficulty for farmers who want to be involved in all negotiations.



## Outlook

Local FOs need to stop side-selling their products. To succeed in this operation, warehouses must be built to store their products. A central warehouse in the major marketing hubs is also needed, and the marketing committee must be revitalized. It is recommended that marketing services be intensified, favouring crops with short planting-to-harvest cycles, planning inventory in shops, tapping into more local markets and favouring the collective system for bringing products to market.



# North Africa

## Union Maghrébine et Nord-Africaine des Agriculteurs (UMNAGRI)



### Perception of the crisis

The crisis did not really affect production in this region. It had more of an impact upstream and downstream in the value chains. It cannot be said that FOs were heavily impacted, except in the countries that are highly dependent on imported inputs and seeds, such as Mauritania. The difference between this crisis and other crises is that it was not a climate shock but a logistical shock. It should also be noted that the crisis was an opportunity for certain value chains: fruit, vegetable and flour sales were up; value chains became shorter; and people cooked more at home. Despite the absence of tourism, food demand was high, and though it sometimes led to shortages of certain foods, there was no agricultural crisis. Households absorbed the production surplus intended for tourism.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

FOs suffered, especially at the grassroots level where internet connection did not allow for work to continue remotely. The pandemic also had an impact on governance in terms of changes in management. The Maghrebin Farmers' Union (Union Maghrébine des Agriculteurs, or UMNAGRI) adopted new technologies for communicating remotely. This was a real innovation. Remote working helped generate savings. The pandemic was an opportunity to boost the organization's visibility. Members could more easily see the role the organization played. As international cooperation gained momentum, the organization engaged in networking and was able to secure additional funds for advocacy and the delivery of new services scheduled for 2022.



### Impact of the crisis on social aspects

Treatments for the disease were rather expensive. A credit system was set up in certain countries to cover hospital expenses. Some UMNAGRI members (for example, UTAP) have formal and informal savings and loan associations (caisses mutuelles).



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

Value chains became shorter. Everyone was buying locally. With the reduction in imports, farmers embraced substitute products. For example, faced with a shortage of seeds for fodder from abroad, farmers in Mauritania rediscovered local seeds, which had been abandoned because of their yield performance. These farmers decided to reintroduce this old variety in their action plan. This was a change that will probably endure beyond the COVID-19 period.



## **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

UMNAGRI members were highly involved in managing the crisis in terms of agricultural aspects. It tried to take action on farmer mobility and promoted local consumption and food sovereignty. There was already a trend in that direction, but it was accelerated. This issue is of particular interest in the agrifood system in the region. People were already consuming local fruits and vegetables, but they also consume a great deal of imported products, such as cheeses. National cheese production rose sharply during the crisis. People had no choice but to buy locally. Producers consequently made an effort in packaging, and a local agrifood sector emerged.



## **Outlook**

People in the region realized the importance of local consumption, short value chains and family farming. UMNAGRI encourages its partners to support local market initiatives and focus less on supporting international initiatives.

# Mauritania

## Fédération Mauritanienne de l'Agriculture (FMA)



### Perception of the crisis

What makes this crisis different is its global dimension and its direct impact on everyone's daily life (lockdown, border closures, restrictions on travel between cities, curfews, etc.). Farmers could no longer go into their fields or plots.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

The regular meetings of the executive bureau were not held, so WhatsApp groups were created. A Regional Offices Liaison and local Listening Centres were set up in each *wilaya* (region) to relay information up from the grassroots level, facilitate discussion among members and disseminate information down to the grassroots level. Since the federation is funded exclusively by member contributions, it had great difficulty setting its budget.



### Impact of the crisis on emergency services and measures

The federation participated in activities to raise awareness. Thanks to IFAD as part of the SAFE 2020 programme, a donation was possible and allowed for the distribution of production kits for seeds, fertilizers, energy, etc. to family farm cooperatives. Demand for assistance was very high, and the donation was not enough to meet it.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

The market-gardening value chain grew substantially.



### Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

The federation intensified its advocacy, and its arguments persuaded the highest-level authorities and were taken into consideration in the emergency programme announced by the government. The federation is a member of the National Employers' Union of Mauritania (Union Nationale du Patronat de Mauritanie) and therefore contributed to the production of a document entitled "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Private Sector, and Measures for Mitigation and Stimulus" in June 2020.



### Outlook

Development of new communication technologies and innovation in transaction methods.

# Southern Africa

## Southern African Confederation of African Unions (SACAU)



### Perception of the crisis

The impact of the disease itself was not as great in many rural areas, but the measures introduced to contain the pandemic had a major impact. Every step in the agricultural value chain was interrupted. The panic caused by the pandemic had an equally large impact. Initially, there was no information about the disease and how to prevent it. The widespread dissemination of misinformation through social media reinforced the sense of panic. This is a very important takeaway from this crisis: how misinformation and lack of timely, accurate information caused so much distress.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

One of the biggest difficulties that FOs faced was the restriction on gatherings. The entire FO operation and member service system is based on meetings, and because there were no digital communication channels in place at the start of the crisis, FOs hardly communicated with their members at all. SACAU helped FOs set up virtual communication channels, and substantial improvements were made, but this was not a given. Farm organizations are still slow to embrace digital technologies, and there is a need to accelerate movement in this direction, as this trend is here to stay and will evolve. If farm organizations fail to follow this trend, they will be left behind.



### Impact of the crisis on services and social measures

Assistance was provided to farmers, mainly by broadcasting information on local radio and television stations and through publications in newspapers. All media gave farmers the opportunity to express themselves and attract attention. With support from SAFE 2020, emergency responses were provided in the form of grants, and stimulus packages were distributed in Namibia and South Africa, but their scope was not broad enough to cover needs.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

The crisis began in March 2020, when farmers needed to harvest, resulting in immediate harvesting and marketing problems. At the start of the crisis, agriculture was not considered an essential sector, and farmers did not have permits to continue their work. Crops were lost, leading to longer-term cashflow problems. In Tanzania and Zimbabwe, for example, exports of flowers and horticultural products were cancelled and, as these are perishable items, entire crops were lost. Input stores were also not considered essential and remained closed for extended periods, which had a particular impact in South Africa and Botswana. In Namibia, the restrictions also led to farm labour shortages. Farmers' organizations have had to negotiate with the government to have agriculture designated an essential sector so it could operate. In Lesotho and South Africa, non-governmental organizations succeeded in designating agriculture a key sector, but even there, the measures to support the sector were inadequate.



## Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

Farmers' organizations were not prepared to play a role in sharing timely, accurate information on health issues, as this was not previously part of their mandate. Furthermore, they were not included in the national platforms for the COVID-19 response and the implementation of measures, so farmers were not included.

In Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Lesotho, the governments specifically asked farmers' organizations for their views about the crisis and its impact on them and how the government could best respond. Opinion papers were written based on consultations with members. This is noteworthy, because it is uncommon for governments to seek the views of farmers' organizations. In the Seychelles and South Africa, FOs have submitted recommendations to governments on their own initiative.

The ZFU produced a COVID-19 pandemic recovery plan, which was included in the government response. In Namibia, an opinion paper was drafted, and the government proposed recovery measures, but they did not reach the majority of farmers and were inadequate.

Governments and other stakeholders used farmers' organizations to reach farmers. This is something that FOs must continue and reinforce if they are to remain relevant. An important element in this regard will be FOs' capacity to collect data and information, to gather evidence. Data collection systems that can fuel advocacy must be strengthened and developed. Experiences from different countries should be shared as they vary widely, and FOs could learn from each other. SACU can play a role in facilitating the necessary exchange, coordination and capacity-building. Data collection systems in Eswatini and Lesotho are more systematic and need to be strengthened to inform and prepare for future crises. ACT in Tanzania and NASFAM in Malawi already had structures in place to do this, even before the pandemic.



## Outlook

"The fact that the role of FOs is changing is inevitable. FOs are no longer simply speaking for their members and providing extension services. It is clear that FOs must move forward and think beyond their traditional role. Expectations have increased and not all FOs are ready to meet these new expectations. Farm organizations need to be resilient by adapting their structures and recruiting the appropriate human resources to be able to respond faster and better to crises. FOs are mainly composed of agronomists, but we need more and more social skills in our organizations to be able to respond to farmers' needs in a holistic way. FOs need to put the right structure, staff, and IT support in place to evolve and meet the changing needs of farmers."



# Madagascar

## Réseau Syndical des Organisations Agricoles (Réseau SOA)



### Perception of the crisis

Madagascar was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Mass graves began to be seen on roadsides. FOs were hit hard overall and slowed their activities (30 per cent completion). Activities are slowly starting to pick up again now, but farmers have lost a great deal. The more remote areas were the most affected. There were a few additional aids, but the procedures were too complicated and too bureaucratic for the FOs. Only the most well-trained ones were able to fill out the applications.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

Associative life was heavily impacted. Contributions fell sharply. In Madagascar, very few leaders have internet connections. Even telephones are not found in every region in the country. It is very hard to hold meetings via Skype due to connection and equipment problems and the fact that farmers are not at all used to it. The organization is sometimes asked to stay connected for eight hours for teleconferences: these are things that are nearly impossible to organize. SOA conducted awareness campaigns, because farmers did not believe that COVID-19 was a serious problem. FOs did not change their orientation in response to the crisis but used instruments for agricultural support, such as those of IFAD to combat the consequences of the disease.



### Impact of the crisis on services and social measures

There was solidarity among farmers: CRAM (an FO from central Madagascar) collected rice to send to the south, which was in the throes of a famine. For advisory services, coordinators mobilized bicycles or motorbikes when they could. The organization also intensified its use of hard copy (paper) informational materials (flyers, posters, small booklets) during the pandemic for experience-sharing, addressing topics such as: how to make compost, organic farming and water management. Radio and television are too expensive.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

FOs did what they could to maintain their economic services, but in a very complex situation, particularly for marketing. When the markets closed, collectors stopped traveling to remote areas. ROFAMA purchased motorbikes to deliver milk and developed distance sales. Many farmers had to sell their harvest quickly and cheaply. The seed value chain was not impacted much, as farmers buy very little.



## Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

The state sometimes makes decisions without engaging in any real discussion with FOs. During the crisis, laws – in particular, a land law and an organic-farming law – were passed without really consulting Réseau SOA. The organization teamed up with civil society to denounce the land law, and the government ultimately back-pedalled. In terms of advocacy, it also negotiated with private entities: for example, with Jirama (electric utility company) to postpone the payment period for electricity bills, and with property owners to postpone payment deadlines for rent.



## Outlook

Online sales were the main innovation, and young people were seen to be particularly involved. In Madagascar, people began buying honey through social networks. However, further development of these NICTs is needed, because Madagascar is still behind as a country in this area. Donors should take care not to propose aid that is ultimately reserved for an elite capable of responding to complicated funding applications. Finally, there is another serious cause for concern: climate change. Some farmers are willing to pay a great deal of money to acquire small irrigation equipment.

# Madagascar

## Union des Coopératives Laitières - Ronono Faritra Matsiatra Ambony (ROFAMA)



### Perception of the crisis

The crisis heavily impacted the cooperative. Everything has been closed since the first wave. All points of sale in the city are closed. All the organization's activities were affected.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

The cooperative has 337 members and 24 employees. It had virtually no new members this year or last. In normal times, it has 30 to 40 new members per year. Its coordinators continued working despite the risks, and the cooperative did not have to furlough any of its employees. However, there are significant salary arrears. In terms of organization, it cannot use the internet. Only people in urban areas have internet access. Only 60 per cent of cooperative members have a phone, and they must sometimes walk 5 km to charge it. Using WhatsApp is impossible. Only text messaging can be used. The board of directors played an important role in decision-making, which was difficult during the crisis. The decisions were made by phone, with full knowledge of the facts, and have had an impact on 1,600 people (300 livestock farmers, 25 indirectly affected people per household).



### Impact of the crisis on services and social measures

Technicians continued to go down to the stables with motorbikes. One trip per day. The cooperative had to use two motorbikes and a tricycle for collection, which significantly increased its costs. It usually uses public transportation, which is half as expensive. Its point of sale was closed in the afternoon, which is why its revenue fell by half. It was able to acquire the tricycle for collection and deliver thanks to a grant from AFDI. Advisory services continued as usual on an individual basis. The cooperative provided masks to livestock farmers and explained what measures to take to avoid COVID-19.

In terms of emergency aid for distress situations, it gave advances on purchased milk (by decision of the board) only to farmers that had the production.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

It was necessary to cut the amount of milk collected in half, from 600 litres to 300 litres. Dairy farmers are very discouraged. ROFAMA buys the milk at MGA 1,500 per litre, but since collection was cut, the farmers have had to sell off the surplus at MGA 600 per litre. The cooperative improved preservation and processing, but milk is a highly perishable product. The FDA allowed it to invest in a ripening room, but that will take time, especially in the current situation. ROFAMA tried to persuade people by phone to come in the morning or place an order so that it could deliver the milk itself (for a delivery fee). For bigger customers with whom it has a contract (e.g. a school, restaurant or hotel), it made home deliveries. This was already being done before the crisis but was intensified.



### Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

ROFAMA received aid for the ripening room from AFDI and IFAD. The government conducted a study to learn about the impact of COVID-19 but has ultimately taken little action. The cooperative received no aid. To get through the crisis, it had to borrow from the bank.



### Outlook

It will take a while to get back to the way things were before the crisis. ROFAMA's livestock farmers have two cows, on average. Thirteen of its members had to sell a cow to get through the crisis – and at half the price. One member had to sell two cows, because of a loan he had to repay. In response to the crisis, the cooperative tried to diversify its customer base as much as it could. It focused on quality (ripening), which allowed it to sell at slightly higher prices. In the event of another wave, it hopes the board will once again be able to make the right decisions. It also hopes it will have partners that will work with it, such as AFDI. The support it needs in these situations includes: transport, storage and processing equipment and marketing support. It also needs to be able to employ salaried technicians, because without them, nothing can get done. Finally, one could imagine a system where financial support is provided to dairy farmers, for example, by increasing the purchase price.

# Pacific Region

## Pacific Islands Farmers Organisation Network (PIFON)



### Perception of the crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted agricultural value chains in all PIFON member countries. Well established value chains (for export and local consumption) ran into major problems with surpluses and shortages and had to be reorganized. The crisis also offered many opportunities to modify operations and the services provided to members, particularly in terms of market connections. There was also a sharp increase in aid from technical and financial partners to help deal with the effects of the crisis (distribution of inputs, etc.). That increase in funding was a challenge for some members, as they had to bolster their internal teams to manage these different sources of funding.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

All member FOs had to change the way they managed their activities and services, and several began using online tools. Farmers in the field are getting more and more used to using NICTs for communicating, finding information and even training. Young people are teaching older people how to use these tools. Farmers were encouraged to use applications for keeping in touch with their FOs, and to record information using applications their FOs have access to (for example: Farms App). Early in the year, PIFON was asked to contribute to a research project for the Australian government. It turned to three of its member FOs to do field research and submit their work to the lead investigator in Australia. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, research institutes would send people on site to collect information and conduct research.



### Impact of the crisis on services

Online training was organized when and where possible, but many farmers do not have ICT, and internet connection is not always great. Two of the countries in the region had ICT training before COVID-19, and most of the participants were young people. Before the crisis, many discussions took place online in those two countries. In another country, “pockets of farmers” were created using WhatsApp: Since in-person training was not possible, farmers asked their questions on WhatsApp (easy-to-use application requiring only a smartphone). YouTube videos were also produced to facilitate dialogue among farmers and provide training. However, they were no substitute for in person training.

In Fiji, PIFON is working with a digital services company called “TraSeable Solutions,” which has developed an app for farmers. We are encouraging farmers to download and use it. Farmers can use the app to enter information (production, prices, etc.) about their farm to help them manage the farm. For the moment, that data is not exploited in a larger system. PIFON recently piloted a study using the app. The crisis has encouraged more widespread use of this farm management tool. PIFON has access to data collected by most of its member FOs. This is an enormous transformation in terms of sharing and storing information and has been one of the positive outcomes of the crisis for PIFON.





## Impact of the crisis on economic life

Storage or processing. In Tonga, one FO created products for export with the surplus production made available by hotel closures. An FO called FRIEND (Foundation for Rural Integrated Development) created a line of frozen products, jams and chutneys that it had already been processing before the crisis, making it easier to export these products and preserve them longer for sale at a later date, while adding value to them. In Papua New Guinea, an FO invested in the creation of storage equipment, for rice in particular, and organized a field-side collection system, as movements had to be limited.

Product distribution was affected and virtual markets were created. In Samoa, Women in Business Development Incorporated (WIBDI) set up a virtual market in May 2020 to connect farmers with local and international buyers. Between May and December, the market generated roughly 25,000 tala (over EUR8,500). Because of this success, the FO continued. There are discussions in Fiji around developing virtual markets. One of PIFON's members in Fiji already had a virtual market, which really took off during the crisis.



## Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

The crisis sparked greater interest in agriculture among the general population and the authorities in particular. This was due to the shutdown of many tourism-related activities and the sharp uptick in unemployment. This "return to the land" has created challenges in terms of land tenure and sustainable resource management, and FOs are trying to find solutions to these problems. There was also more discussion and cooperation between FOs and governments (e.g. watermelon in Tonga) on various topics, such as training (Cook Islands and fishing). In addition, in several countries highly dependent on imports for their food supply, FOs worked on trade policies with their respective governments to help reduce dependence and boost national production.



## Outlook

PIFON has noticed an overall greater focus on traditional food crops, such as breadfruit, since the start of the pandemic. One of its FOs launched a series of webinars on breadfruit in early 2021 in partnership with researchers to further explore the crop's potential, particularly with regard to climate change. In Samoa, teas were formerly produced primarily for export, but with the crisis, farmers had to consider the local market and introduced a wide variety of "tonics" for local consumers. Even when everything returns to normal, some things will have changed. There are already discussions about other possibilities for tourism involving niche experiences such as agrotourism, farm visits and the introduction of other types of products in hotel restaurants (greater focus on local and traditional products).

The crisis showed PIFON that it could work differently and to do a lot of things remotely and faster than it normally would have. It may be that after the crisis, members will not move around as much, but in-person interaction will still be necessary.

# Fiji

## Fiji Beekeepers Association



### Perception of the crisis

There were several phases during the crisis. In March 2020, Fiji saw a sharp drop in tourism and a decline in demand for honey, as honey is not a basic necessity. A large percentage of the population lost their job and had to reduce their spending. However, there were no COVID-19 cases, so work could proceed as usual. In 2021, Fiji was hit hard by the virus. Several regions went into lockdown, and travel between regions was not allowed. The association had to curtail training activities and all its events in the field. Nonetheless, it continued its mentoring programme (where an experienced beekeeper trains a novice beekeeper).



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

The crisis heavily impacted associative life. People suddenly took much greater interest in agriculture in general, and beekeeping in particular. People who had lost their job returned to their land to find other sources of income. Many suddenly took an interest in beekeeping and began requesting information and training. The association received more than 20 requests per week. It had to adapt and produce brochures explaining how to start a beekeeping operation and providing lists of equipment suppliers for getting started. This trend may not last over the long term. Once tourism and the economy return to normal, enthusiasm will likely wane. There was an increase in the number of members. In January 2020, just before the crisis, the association's Facebook page had around 1,000 followers. It now has 6,700. There was also a significant increase in the demand for training. In 2020, the association held 27 training sessions, the most ever. It organized many Zoom sessions for its bureau meetings, board meetings and webinars. There were no communication problems, but a Zoom meeting does not allow for the same level of conversation as an in-person meeting, nor does it permit informal conversations or the sharing of ideas unrelated to the meeting's agenda. Conversations were limited to 40 minutes.



### Impact of the crisis on emergency services and measures

The association did not take emergency action. Distributing free aid is hard: how to decide who is entitled to receive it and who is not is difficult. It purchased a honey extractor through the FO4ACP programme and asked all members who were interested and willing to coordinate as a group to share the equipment. The association does not have "give-away programmes". It always tries to incorporate a component where the beneficiary must contribute something. For example, through the mentoring programme, it purchased hives from a private company at market price. It visited experienced beekeepers and asked them if they wanted to train novice beekeepers (six sessions during the year) in exchange for 10 hives. We are therefore helping hive producers to improve their business, mentors to acquire equipment and beginners to acquire skills.



### **Impact of the crisis on economic life**

The crisis had a tremendous impact on honey sales, as the drop in tourism led to a drop in income for many island inhabitants. The volume of honey sold has fallen by 20 per cent to 30 per cent, but to date, prices have not fallen as much as expected. The association designed an initiative to develop processing and create value added: "The value-added bee products" initiative, aimed at encouraging the production of honey-based products (beekeepers almost exclusively produce liquid honey). It held workshops where participants learned how to make wax and skin creams, and it produced and distributed practical guides (with Australian funding support from ACIAR). Beekeeping is also a field largely dominated by female beekeepers. This initiative was conceived before the crisis, but the crisis provided the impetus to launch it.



### **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

The association has always had a good working relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Biosecurity. The crisis did not hurt it, but Zoom conversations do not allow for the same relationships or interpersonal connections. The association has lost something of the closeness of its interactions. No specific action was taken by the authorities on behalf of beekeepers. Instead, the crisis stunted partnerships and exchanges.

# Haïti

## Association des Agriculteurs français et développement international (AFDI)



### Perception of the crisis

The crisis heavily impacted FOs at the start of the pandemic. All activities were reduced: meetings, group activities, training, etc. Many had to be reoriented to deal with the crisis itself.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

AFDI changed course to receive aid and protect the local population, focusing its activities more on the crisis (awareness-raising, education, motivation), because farmers did not really believe that COVID-19 was a serious problem. It significantly increased the use of NICTs. In AFDI's location, 80 per cent of farmers have a smartphone and the association uses several WhatsApp groups.



### Impact of the crisis on services

The number of members invited to training sessions was reduced to comply with health regulations. Association activities are slowly picking up again, but face-to-face contact is still avoided. AFDI was able to continue its advisory services, with advice focusing on new crops with short planting-to-harvest cycles. FOs also served as relays for emergency aid.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

The crisis created a marketing problem. Restrictions on movement between the north and south of the island meant that buyers stayed home. There were a lot of disruptions, both shortages and overproduction. While some cooperatives had to shut down, there were also new opportunities for products that were no longer coming from the Dominican Republic that could be produced in Haiti – eggs, for example, 95 per cent of which are usually imported. With the crisis, a number of cooperatives have begun producing eggs, with very good results. There has been a rise in the number of poultry farms. Likewise, for salami production. Haitians like to consume local products. Local salami has fewer chemicals, costs less, and is of better quality. The same holds true for bell peppers; border closures led to an increase in their cultivation.



### **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

Relations between FOs and the authorities are not very good. There was little discussion of decisions. Haiti is an authoritarian state that is not afraid to impose penalties. FOs engaged in advocacy through a civil-society platform (PREPLA).



### **Outlook**

The association engaged in health-related activities for the first time, helping to improve hygiene in some FOs. Health-protection systems were created: cells with hygiene supervisors, quality-control systems. Innovations in processing also helped to improve quality (ground maize, rice).

As for lessons learned, AFDI noticed that certain types of production could be intensified at the local level, making farmers less dependent on external factors. Governments now need to support FOs in this direction. There are products that could be grown with input support policies and border protection measures.



# Dominican Republic

## Asociación Agrícola Noroestana (ASOANOR)



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

With the start of the pandemic, only 30 per cent of employees kept working at the office part time, and there was no change in the number of association members. All meetings were suspended during the pandemic. Communication between the association's headquarters and partners was hindered by the poor internet connection in rural areas and the partners' limited knowledge of modern communication technologies. In the few cases where it was possible to hold virtual meetings and consultations with executive members, no more than 10 participants could be connected at the same time on the same virtual channel.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

Input, fuel, transport and labour prices have soared since the pandemic. According to estimates, fruit prices are now what they were 10 years ago. To limit the problems caused by the economic pressure on producers, ASOANOR attempted to apply certain measures to achieve economies of scale, purchasing inputs in bulk in order to sell them to members at a lower price than the external market price. Procedures were also put in place to facilitate payments, which were extended from 8 to 16 weeks. A biofermentation facility belonging to the association was upgraded in collaboration with CLAC. In response to the increase in transport costs, ASOANOR subsidized the purchase of a truck for distributing inputs directly to farmers' fields at no extra cost to the farmers. A revolving loan fund was also set up for farmers to train and support them in their cultivation and help them repay their loans.



### Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

No new partnerships were created. There was, however, a drop in local demand, estimated at 35 per cent to 40 per cent lower than normal. This caused fruit prices to plummet from 900 to 150 pesos per kg as a result of overproduction. Because of the drop in prices, there was a large fruit surplus that could not be put on the market, and it has clearly been impossible to invest in new types of agricultural production over the past year and a half. Moreover, in September alone, most farmers were hit hard by two serious weather events. Although they have insurance, the policies cover only 20 per cent of the costs involved. There was an attempt at collaboration between the association and the government to distribute that surplus to the most vulnerable parts of the country by selling the fruit at a discount, but it was not as successful as expected. To help with post-hurricane recovery efforts, the association will set up a fertilization system at no direct cost to farmers. AFDI also reached out to ministry and financial institutions, asking for the deferment of payments. It is still awaiting a response from the Ministry of Agriculture.



### Outlook

As an association of small farmers, ASOANOR is governed by the legal framework for NGOs. It is currently trying to become a cooperative. Doing so will benefit members because of the facilities that the law offers to cooperatives but not NGOs.

# Dominican Republic

## Bananos Ecológicos de la Línea Noroeste (BANELINO)



### Perception of the crisis

Agriculture in the Dominican Republic requires a long trajectory of learning and resilience. Hurricanes and other natural phenomena are constantly undermining work and production, and the arrival of COVID-19 was no exception.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

Work in the field continued despite restrictions, even though it was hard getting used to social distancing, as physical contact is important in Dominican culture. Adapting to technology, particularly for communication, was another obstacle for farmers. Using the internet remains a challenge because of poor internet connection. In response to the health crisis, BANELINO organized a communication chain through its health team. Three times a week, written and video messages were sent out in both Spanish and Creole to provide information about formal measures to adopt, up to the creation of a prevention protocol. Moreover, in collaboration with CLAC, posters were produced with information on measures to prevent the disease. All organizations collect and manage data on production and COVID-19 cases.



### Impact of the crisis on emergency services and measures

With regard to technical advisory services, BANELINO maintained an individual service for farmers in the field. As for emergency measures, it set up a centre where it could use rapid antigen tests to detect COVID-19 among members. Health facilities were overwhelmed, and the association played a key role for them in terms of communication and practical preventive measures. It maintained contact with institutions. In some cases, it even distributed sachets containing basic medication to alleviate symptoms and held vaccination days in partnership with the Ministry of Health. It also distributed equipment for fumigating and disinfecting worksites and created a fund to provide financial aid to the families of the most vulnerable members stricken by the virus. It could not cover all farms, however, because many of them are in remote regions. It also held workshops on domestic violence prevention, depression and other illnesses, but had to terminate or limit some activities, such as a project for the integration of young people and BANELINO schools, because of the pandemic.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

Because of the general increase in prices over the past year and a half, particularly for inputs, and since banana prices have remained stable, some farmers had no choice but to leave the association because they couldn't cover the economic cost. Efforts were made to teach farmers to produce organic fertilizers themselves to make them less dependent on the external market and help them become more resilient to future crises. The FO4ACP project supported certain activities to promote plant biodiversity and the development of markets other than banana. These actions are currently being reviewed, as they are still at a basic level.

# India

## Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)



### Perception of the crisis

The first wave was slightly less serious in rural areas, but during the second wave, there were about 10 COVID-19 deaths in each village, and people were really afraid. There was very little access to medical care, and people could not go to hospitals in urban areas. Moreover, India went into lockdown just as products were ready to be sold. Farmers could not reach markets. Harvests were kept at home. Some farmers did not even harvest, since there was no longer any transport to the markets and in any case, the markets were closed. Nevertheless, vegetables are perishable and must be sold daily. The consequences were disastrous. Income for the growing season was down, which also affected preparations for the following season.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

SEWA is an organization for women, mostly from rural areas, with operations in 18 Indian states. Through its network of leaders, who have smartphones, the association was able to communicate and share information on what was happening at the local level. SEWA also tries to introduce its members to new technologies, such as digital finance, electronic platforms and e-commerce. It was already doing that a little, but now the need was much stronger. This was very important during the crisis. Special hotlines were created so that people could obtain information and advice on COVID-19 over the phone. Materials for raising awareness were also produced and shared within the groups through electronic media. A total of 7,500 women received training in how to use payment apps and online platforms for payment and digital marketing during the crisis.



### Emergency measures

SEWA collaborated with the government to deliver food kits. For example, salt producers work eight months in the desert, build temporary housing and go there with their family. During lockdown, they found themselves in the desert without any food or water. They were able to continue working with the solar panels they had, but they had no food. SEWA contacted the government, and food kits were distributed – one free kit and one kit for purchase each month. SEWA tried to put farmers in contact with hospitals so that they could receive psychological support. Advisory services were set up to help members deal with the situation, raise awareness about prevention and ensure that any members with symptoms were referred to a hospital and had access to aid. Posters were produced, and WhatsApp groups were created to share information and voice messages and create awareness programmes. Doctors also provided digital assistance for members, as rural areas do not always have doctors. A service offering COVID-19 tests at a reduced price was set up for SEWA members. As hospitals were full at one point, the association distributed oximeters so that they would know when they should go to a hospital. The second wave was very difficult, as hospitals were full. In certain rural villages, the association began clearing community centres to set up a place where people could isolate while receiving medical care. It created a database and set up a hotline offering assistance over the phone so that members would know where oxygen was available in hospitals or clinics, because people did not know where to go when they were really sick.



## Impact of the crisis on economic life

The products were there, but farmers were unable to sell them. These farmers still had loans to repay and needed money for the next season. Buyers wanted to take advantage of the situation and purchase products at a discount. SEWA negotiated contracts with rural companies; for example, in the cumin value chain, 200 tonnes were negotiated with a company. For vegetables that could not be sent to the cities and would otherwise rot, the association connected a restaurant with vegetable growers so that the restaurant could obtain fresh vegetables and the farmers could sell their produce. SEWA also has economic activities that focus on green lifestyle, forgotten foods and local climate-resilient agroecology products. For example, it started buying vegetables in the Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar districts and provided a market platform in Kamla. Kamla is a place where customers used to go for safe and healthy food before the lockdown and where they learned to adopt an eco-friendly lifestyle. Kamla has a loyal customer base, which was used to spread the message about vegetables directly from farmers among the customers. Initially, customers within walking distance of Kamla began buying vegetables, and gradually, home delivery began. SEWA began by providing 50 kg of vegetables per day, and then 1,200. The demand continued to grow when Kamla began home delivery under a strict lockdown. Word spread to various remote areas about the vegetables, the quality of the produce and the hygiene, and orders began pouring in. This necessitated the creation of a few hubs that could store the produce and serve customers in these areas. Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has begun supplying vegetables to different areas of Ahmedabad city through e-rickshaws. AMC provided SEWA with seven e-rickshaws and began supplying vegetables in the selected areas. The rickshaws were driven by the corporation's drivers and picked up around seven to eight vendors each, taking them to the designated area to sell their vegetables. AMC disseminated the information about selling vegetables by rickshaw throughout the city, enabling vendors to access the market. Vendors began selling vegetables and fruits for about Rs. 1,500 -2,000 per day and taking away Rs. 400-500, giving dignity to vendors who could sell from the rickshaw. After realizing that there was a need for local food supply chains and short localized supply chains, it developed a plan for a decentralized system of supply chains and is in the process of implementing it.



## Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

SEWA informed the state about the precarious situation of farmers (at the central and regional levels) and how they were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. When people did not receive aid from the government, it tried to ensure that everyone had access to it. Local governments also began offering their support.



## Outlook

SEWA has started working on and strengthening shorter supply chains and will continue to do so. It would also like to examine soil inputs and the use of technologies to help farmers become more climate-resilient. It would like to reintroduce traditional and forgotten foods that are more climate-resistant. It would also like to ensure the food security of members' households, even though supply chains have been disrupted and they have no income. SEWA plans to create a resilience fund to provide immediate support to farmers without the need for specific documents, so that they can obtain speedy access to funding, regardless of their situation. This is very important during a crisis.

# Lao People's Democratic Republic

## Lao Farmers Network (LFN)



### Perception of the crisis

This crisis is totally different from earlier ones, because of how long it has lasted, the unpredictability of restrictions, market instability, the intermittent lack of demand and the difficulty obtaining goods in other regions across the country. Transporting harvests to market has been especially difficult for people living in remote areas. Some areas have had no supply of goods. During the first lockdown, consumers were not even able to go to markets offering fresh produce. Despite these problems, global demand for agricultural products remains high, particularly because the quantity of imported products is falling. The reduction in imported foods has created opportunities for local production. LFN has offered online training to help members diversify their production to meet demand.



### Impact of the crisis on services

The FO normally offers four types of service: networking, farmer-to-farmer training, marketing support and access to loans and seed. During the pandemic, however, it has been hard to maintain the quality and quantity of member services, particularly because of movement restrictions. Communication is difficult, and older members find technology hard to use. In particular, LFN has not been able to provide lending services and seed distribution as it normally does. The COVID-19 crisis has affected, in particular, activity related to training and communication between farmers. The network has not found a solution to the suspension of training and advisory services. It is trying to use social media to share best practices (Facebook Live), but this is still not effective, despite the fact that internet connection is very good, even in remote areas. Many farmers do not know how to use NICTs. Some of them do not know how to read or write. Online training is never as good as in-person training. LFN has tried to engage young farmers from each region to help older people gain access to information.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

Internet connection is good throughout the country, even in rural areas. WhatsApp is increasingly being used to communicate with members. LFN has created an app to facilitate communication and online sales. Consumers are asked to log in to the app and place orders directly. During the crisis, farmers received aid for rice. The price of rice was secured.



### **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

LFN had difficulties with national and local institutions, and even with the police, which hindered its activities. It collected data by phone about all the problems encountered by its members and shared its findings with the ministry, but no concrete solution or response has been provided. It also published messages on social networks about inconsistencies in transport policies and produced videos on the impact of restrictions on farmers. Finally, it drafted an official letter in collaboration with village authorities.



### **Outlook**

Farmers will need to be trained in how to use NICTs. LFN noted that NICTs and remote communication are very important for emergency response. It is likewise important to further develop storage, processing and preservation to minimize post-harvest losses. This will be helpful in other future emergencies.



# Mongolia

## National Association of Mongolian Agricultural Cooperatives (NAMAC)



### Perception of the crisis

NAMAC is a cooperative of transhumant livestock farmers in a remote region of western Mongolia. Its membership consists of 212 households with 349 individual members. The crisis had many impacts on the cooperative, many of which were positive. The greatest difficulty (and what distinguished this crisis from others) was the uncertainty. The association does not know who will be infected when, or what will be closed or for how long.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

The most vulnerable families (those with few animals) were most affected by the crisis, as the cost of food and basic necessities rose sharply. There were also food shortages. It was therefore complicated even for the cooperative to stock up on supplies for the store for its members.

With regard to communication for office staff, the association used e-mail, phone and remote work so that it could continue working during the crisis and lockdowns.

Before the crisis, there was already a Facebook group where members could communicate with one another, but with the crisis, the cooperative significantly systematized the use of that platform to share information quickly and effectively among members and between members and staff.



### Impact of the crisis on services

The cooperative set up a new delivery service. During lockdown, it had permission from the authorities to make deliveries between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.: two sellers worked with one driver to deliver the orders. The most vulnerable members may buy on credit. Members have long been buying food and basic necessities mainly from the cooperative, especially because they have the option of paying later or in kind (in exchange for their production). Many buyers from the cooperative were not able to pay. The cooperative therefore has a lot of IOUs, which is weighing on its cash position but has allowed the most vulnerable members to continue obtaining the goods they need.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

The crisis had a positive impact. Because of lockdowns, travel restrictions and border closures, intermediaries (particularly Chinese intermediaries) could no longer come to collect products from its members. The association usually collects two tonnes of cashmere (wool) each year. This year, it collected nine. Under normal circumstances, it cannot compete with Chinese buyers, but the situation enabled it to take their place. Most of its members sold it all of their production this year.

The cashmere was sold without problems to the usual partner (a Chinese processing company), and the FO was easily able to rent a truck to transport the cashmere. Another positive impact of the crisis was that the cooperative's supermarkets generated a very high level of revenue. Transport costs substantially increased because of the lockdown, and few transport companies were operating this year. Small shops and supermarkets were unable to receive timely delivery of stocks. The cooperative, however, has its own trucks. With the crisis, it developed online sales with the transfer of funds via mobile phone. To avoid cash payments (for fear of transmitting the virus), the use of online banking apps substantially increased, which also makes it easier for cooperative management: less paper, faster and more secure transactions. Someone is then in charge of transporting the products and delivering them to the customer. Many livestock farmers opened a bank account with online services. With the crisis, 10 per cent of everyday transactions are now made in cash, and 90 per cent are online. However, there has also been a negative effect: everything used to be done face-to-face, but now there is less interpersonal interaction, less human contact.



### **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

There were tensions with the public authorities. Because of the lockdown, transhumant farmers were no longer allowed to go to the village to sell their products and buy goods.

The cooperative employed several tactics: i) pressuring the authorities to allow livestock farmers to go to villages to buy and sell; ii) sending official letters to governors to explain the situation – the fact that there are only two or three times during the year for the production and sale of wool and meat and the catastrophic situation for livestock farmers if they cannot sell at these times; iii) issuing a massive call to the people in charge of emergencies in each village to demand the right of livestock farmers to go to the village to sell their products. The lobbying was successful.



### **Outlook**

The cooperative introduced three major innovations: it was the first organization in the village to create a delivery system; it introduced risk prevention and management strategies (shorter hours of operation for shops, back-up staff, etc.); and it significantly reduced spending because of the lockdown and the development of remote working. It has come to realize that much of its spending was unnecessary.

# Mercosur Region

COPROFAM, MUCECH (Chile),  
CIOEC (Bolivia), CONTAG (Brazil),  
CNFR (Uruguay)



## Perception of the crisis

The impact of the crisis on FOs varied from country to country. Each was affected differently by the virus and government measures. Furthermore, some countries have a political and institutional context more favourable to family farming, while others, less so. In Uruguay, agricultural value chains geared to the local market suffered more than agriculture for export. In Chile, the organization of value chains and distribution to urban centres was maintained thanks to FO advocacy with the government. Bolivian agriculture, which is geared more to local markets, was heavily impacted by market closures and movement restrictions. In Brazil, the government's failure to provide effective responses to the crisis exacerbated the health and socioeconomic impact on rural households to such an extent that extreme poverty and food insecurity dramatically worsened.



## Impact of the crisis on associative life

All FOs in each country embraced digital tools for communicating and working, which in some cases would have been unthinkable before the pandemic. In Uruguay, for example, CNFR held its first annual election council through an online regional commission (40 members), with significant participation by its local members, giving greater legitimacy to the vote. According to CONTAG, adopting new operating methods based on digital tools enabled it to explore new paradigms for internal operations at the national and local level.

The advantages of digital communication are less evident at the local level and differ from country to country. The pandemic highlighted the potential of digital tools for expanding the coverage of the extension services and training that CNFR offers its members, but poor internet connection in certain parts of each country hindered the roll-out of these new modes of communication and laid bare geographic and intergenerational inequalities. FOs said that more systematic use of digital tools was hindered by poor access to them and the fact that member farmers had difficulty using new technologies. Problems using digital tools also helped build solidarity among community members, as young farmers reached out to train their older peers. According to MUCECH, the generation gap and the gap between rural and urban areas in access to digital tools needs to be reduced. CNFR made the same observation and believes that upgrading the digital skills of all members is a prerequisite for expanding the use of digital tools.



### Impact of the crisis on social services and measures

FOs, particularly in Brazil and Chile, played an essential new role, informing people in rural areas about the risk of infection with the coronavirus and steering vaccination campaigns toward rural areas. CONTAG and its federations became deeply involved in a communication and awareness campaign targeting their members and local FOs to counter denialism and halt the spread of the virus. In a different context, MUCECH in Chile helped roll out vaccination campaigns in rural areas, targeting farmers and their families in particular, and called on the government make the vaccination of farmers a priority.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

In response to the disruption of local value chains, CIOEC set up mobile markets to increase the economic resilience and food security of local producers. By collecting agricultural products from producers and selling them to consumers, this Bolivian FO has taken on a new role in marketing and logistics for goods produced by its members. It intends to continue this new role, which addresses issues that were identified before the crisis, such as difficulty accessing markets for family farmers, the low visibility of their products, and value addition. Since its creation at the start of the pandemic, the model for mobile markets has already been replicated in new localities. It has not only helped make family farm products accessible to a large portion of the population but has heightened the visibility of certain products such as moringa, turmeric and stevia, while shortening the marketing chain and revitalizing the organization's associative life. Mobile markets have been a big hit with certain cooperatives that are affiliated at the departmental level but have been on standby. All this interest has helped revive activities at the local level in connection with the national branch and has sparked large-scale mobilization among members. Other FOs, such as CNFR in Uruguay, have also taken on the role of facilitating product sales by developing an electronic platform in collaboration with the government. In a more difficult context, Brazil's CONTAG also helped its member federations set up new forms of marketing and provide extension services using digital tools.



### Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment

The Uruguayan government loosened the requirements for accessing non-repayable aid during the pandemic and decided to allocate at least 20 per cent of the Ministry of Agriculture's budget to family farming. In Chile, a credit facility was created during the crisis in collaboration with agricultural development institutes. Farmers also benefited from the loosening of eligibility criteria for businesses to access national credit facilities. In Brazil, the pandemic drove CONTAG to intensify its collaboration with civil society organizations and its communication with the general public in a context marked by enormous differences between family farming and large-scale farming for export. Major advocacy efforts were undertaken to maintain the national programme for the purchase of family farm products, continue programmes for supplying food to school cafeterias closed during the pandemic, extend loan repayment deadlines and provide emergency loans to farmers, especially through the Assis Carvalho bill. The emphasis on family farming's contribution to better nutrition was an opportunity to discuss and inform the general public about the need to make agricultural systems more sustainable and reduce their impact on biodiversity, especially through agroecology. The intensification of advocacy in support of family farming and its focus on social themes helped boost the visibility of issues linked to sustainability and climate change.



## Outlook

In Bolivia, the crisis bolstered CIOEC's associative life and made its member FOs more proactive. It also led to new partnerships to facilitate the marketing of family farm products at an affordable price while developing value added and processing procedures for certain products, such as chocolate, quinoa and coffee. In Chile, the pandemic helped increase the value of farmers and farming in the eyes of the general public and the media. The role of family farmers in supplying fresh and healthy food products showed that they are not only people who work the land but play a role that is vital to society, contribute to sustainable development and help adapt to crises. The government's promotion of healthy foods and consumers' interest in legumes drove MUCECH to become more involved in developing these value chains. This change in the perception of family farming and consumers' strong interest in healthy products encouraged the Chilean FO to promote local consumption. The pandemic also enabled it, through the large-scale adoption of digital tools, to implement training methods developed a few years earlier, geared to young people in particular. Faced with the need to play a growing advocacy role and offer more support to members in times of crisis, CONTAG and its federations engaged in discussions on their own internal strengths and weaknesses to heighten their influence and integration. Better internal cohesion is essential, as it also guarantees major financial viability for federations.

# Republic of Moldova

## Federation of Farmers in Moldova (FARM)



### Perception of the crisis

FARM viewed the crisis as a challenge that it adapted to on its own, since it received no special support from the government. The priority given to health issues eclipsed the needs of the agricultural sector, which was also weakened by episodes of drought.



### Impact of the crisis on associative life

The crisis heightened FARM's focus on integrating young people from rural areas into the agricultural sector. Young people often abandon the sector to move to urban areas or abroad. FARM now counts as many as 300 young people among its members. Through a partnership with one of its donors, it has also developed an approach with a greater focus on the specific challenges faced by female and elderly farmers.



### Impact of the crisis on services

Advisory support services were halted. The shift of certain training modules to an online format took some time, but FARM members are now very familiar with all the platforms. FARM also set up an online advisory support service during the pandemic, particularly for aspects related to management and entrepreneurship (for instance, help in designing business plans). Nevertheless, online training is no substitute for in-person technical activities offering support and advisory services, which FARM will continue to provide to farmers on their farms.



### Impact of the crisis on economic life

The closure of FARM's offices for two months and the transition period required to incorporate digital tools into operations had a negative impact on interactions with partners. FARM's staff trained its members in the use of digital platforms such as Zoom and Teams. The majority of members gradually adopted and mastered the use of these platforms.

The work done by FARM well before the pandemic to facilitate online sales of its members' agricultural products and broaden access to information on agricultural markets was a real advantage. FARM used regional platforms such as Agravista and East-fruit to support the development of online sales and transactions. Access to those platforms helped FARM members take advantage of new sales opportunities and understand market price trends.





## **Impact of the crisis on the institutional environment**

FARM usually holds general assemblies that bring its members together, at which time advocacy strategies are defined and developed. During the crisis, these assemblies inevitably occurred online and included fewer farmers.



## **Outlook**

Digitalization of the organization's services during the pandemic will continue as long as it makes the services more effective. An approach that combines the provision of services and technical advice in person and remotely appears to be the best option.

Although FARM's members have diversified somewhat after slight changes in the organization's targeting strategy, its mandate and purpose remain unchanged.

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## Perception of the crisis by leaders

### Scope of the crisis

Was your FO strongly impacted by the COVID crisis? How is the crisis evolving?

Was the crisis experienced as a structural shock?

How is this crisis different from other crises?

## Changes in associative life

### Membership

Did your FO experience a decline in associative life, or renewed motivation among members?

Did your members' expectations change with respect to the FO?

Did your FO experience a change in the number of members following the crisis?

Did your FO observe renewed solidarity between its members?

Were some types of members more affected by the crisis than others?

### Coordination

Did your FO develop new tools for coordinating the organization during lockdown?

Was your staff able to continue working during the crisis? What measures did you put in place in order to be able to continue working?

Do you think that after this crisis, the way in which the organization is coordinated will change for the long term?

### Communication

Did your FO experience communication difficulties between members and their representatives?

Did you develop new communication technologies?

Did your FO develop new systems for monitoring or relaying information?

Did your FO launch specific communication campaigns during this crisis? (through what media, and on which topics?)

### Steering

Did the crisis spark new debates in governance bodies?

Did the crisis give rise to new orientations for the FO?

Did it lead to changes in governance?

## Changes in economic life

### Economic activities

Were the FO's economic activities (purchases, sales, processing, collection, etc.) affected by the crisis? Did the FO develop new specific activities (storage solutions, processing, transport, etc.) to uphold its commitments while waiting for restrictions to be lifted?

### Economic partnerships

What impacts did the crisis have on current partnerships or contracts?

Were new economic partnerships established (with suppliers or customers, or within an interprofessional framework)?

### **Value chains**

Were new agricultural value chains developed during the crisis?

### **Funding**

Did your FO face difficulties or new opportunities in terms of funding?

## **Changes in services for members**

### **Standard services**

Did your FO experience any changes in the provision of its standard services for members? Did the division of roles between the geographical levels of your network change?

### **Advisory services**

Were there any specific changes to advisory services for farmers during the crisis? Did your FO develop new advisory services for members to alleviate the effects of the crisis?

### **Emergency aid**

Did your FO offer specific aid to members who were particularly affected by the crisis? (distribution of seed, inputs, protective supplies, coupons, cash transfers, etc.?) How were beneficiaries targeted? If yes, what were the difficulties/achievements?

### **Social protection**

Did your FO set up services relating to formal or informal social protection (e.g. funeral insurance) before and after the epidemic?

## **Changes in the institutional environment**

### **Relations with the authorities**

Did your FO observe a change in its relations with the authorities since the start of the crisis? Did it receive new solicitations or have to face new requests from the government or the local authorities? Did it encounter additional difficulties having its voice heard?

### **Advocacy**

Did your FO develop new advocacy initiatives during the crisis? Was the crisis an opportunity to develop new arguments? To engage in new political battles?

### **Alliances/Partnerships**

Did your FO forge new alliances during the crisis with other CSOs, technical and financial partners, or economic operators to influence the authorities?

### **Changes in support for FOs**

Did the crisis change your partners' practices with respect to support?

Did the crisis give rise to new types of support?

### **Remote working**

What were the consequences of developing remote working for partners?



## Recap of the main changes for the FO

### **Innovations**

What were the main innovations in the FO driven by the crisis?

Aside from the negative impacts, did the crisis present new opportunities?

### **Lessons learned**

In the event of a new wave of COVID-19, what measures would you take for your FO?

What advice would you give to other FOs hit hard by the crisis?

### **Planning ahead**






Will these changes affect the FO over the long term?

How will FOs have to change in the years to come? How do you think it will be possible to make that change? What needs to be implemented?





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