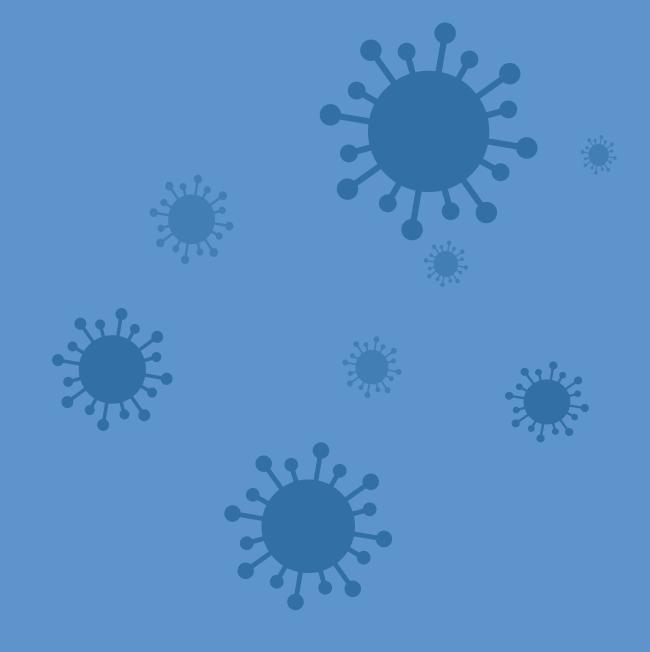**Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations**

Interim guidance: sustaining FAO's commitment to Environmental and Social Standards during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Rome, 2020

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The world faces an unprecedented threat from COVID-19. This is the most challenging crisis the world has faced since the Second World War. It is a global health crisis unlike any other — one that is spreading human suffering, destabilizing the global economy and upending the lives of billions of people around the globe. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has announced a global recession as bad as or worse than in 2009. Some estimates suggest that in the Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, the adverse impacts could result in poverty levels similar to those recorded 30 years ago (UNU-WIDER, 2020). The International Labour Organization (ILO) expects working hours equivalent to 195 million full-time workers to be lost globally in the second quarter of 2020, with workers losing as much as USD 3.4 trillion in income by the end of 2020. The potential threat of COVID-19 to the achievement of many United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG1 on ending poverty and SDG2 on zero hunger is very high.

Full impacts of COVID-19 on food security and agricultural food systems are not yet known as the global pandemic continues to evolve and has differential impacts in various countries. As the UN agency whose sole mandate is related to food security, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is particularly concerned about the potential impacts of the virus on countries already experiencing high levels of food insecurity and/or existing humanitarian crises where significant portions of the population are vulnerable to external shocks. As of mid-April 2020, countries with high levels of acute food insecurity have not yet registered propagation of the virus at the scale at which it is spreading in some other parts of the world, but the situation could quickly change. FAO assesses that in countries already affected by existing shocks, including political instability and conflict and natural disasters, a COVID-19 outbreak could further exacerbate tensions, especially in countries experiencing conflict, desert locust outbreaks or other natural disasters, or protracted economic crises.

COVID-19 is expected to impact the nutritional and health status of the people in two ways – (i) causing those who are already malnourished to become more vulnerable and immune-compromised (such as severely malnourished children, older people and those living with HIV/TB) and (ii) compromising the availability, access, and/or affordability of healthy and balanced diets, affecting nutritionally vulnerable groups, especially in countries where there was malnourishment before COVID-19.

Under physical distancing provisions, labour availability for agricultural supply chains has become a near universal problem. Low-income countries and labour-intensive production sectors, especially those relying on seasonal and migrant workers (fruit and vegetables as well as meat or dairy production) are particularly vulnerable. While impacts of COVID-19 on the food and agriculture sector in the medium term are difficult to predict, the experiences from previous pandemics and the food price crisis of 2008 suggest the large-scale impacts on food supply and demand. These include the capacity to produce and distribute food, high demand for medical care, constrained transport of goods to markets, and restricted access to farmlands and fisheries would disproportionally affect the poor and vulnerable. Additional pressure on natural resources can be foreseen because of unemployment and urban-rural migration, with significant long-term implications for food security and sustainable production.

COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting rural women's productive, reproductive and income-generating capacities, by reducing their economic opportunities and access to nutrition, while increasing their work loads and escalating the risks of gender-based violence (GBV). Compared to men, rural women are more vulnerable due to their limited access to inputs, markets, services such as finance, extension, information and labor availability. Consequently, women's food and crop production can decline, retail trade fall and businesses collapse, especially if they specialize in perishable foods.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a human crisis – not a banking or economic crisis. The UN is calling for a people-centered response that engages communities affected by COVID-19, respects human rights and inclusion, gender equality and dignity for all. UN urges governments to focus on people – low-wage workers, small and medium enterprises and the most vulnerable. Women and children, marginalized, disabled and

displaced persons are most vulnerable and more likely to suffer devastating losses from this pandemic. Proactive and anticipatory management, especially investments in safeguarding livelihoods and the functioning of local food systems (including food production), as well as the accessibility and affordability of balanced, healthy and sustainable diets are crucial to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and containment measures by:

- stabilizing incomes and access to safe food;

- minimizing the impact of lockdowns and quarantines on planting, harvesting, food processing and access to markets for both suppliers and consumers;

- supporting the capacity of all actors along the food system to continue producing and delivering affordable, adequate, safe, diverse and culturally appropriate foods, including access to health, sanitary and ecosystem services, while recognizing distinct and complementary roles of men and women;

- ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain including between rural and urban areas, and

- ensuring people along the food supply chain are not at risk of transmission.

FAO's target groups will depend on the country context, but special attention should be given to the following vulnerable groups:

- subsistence and small-scale producers;

- agricultural workers, particularly landless farmers;

- workers along the rural-urban food value chain;

- forest-dependent communities;

- vulnerable fishers and fishing communities;

- vulnerable nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists who will face movement limitations;

- migrants working in agri-food systems, rural households dependent on remittances, return migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees;

- marginalized ethnic minorities;

- indigenous peoples' groups;

- women, youth and children, disabled people as well as older persons.

This document intends to reflect non-binding, indicative guidance and recommendations with respect to ensuring compliance with FAO's commitment to environmental and social standards in programming. The guidance is not a replacement to national, regional and local mandates on COVID-19. All FAO projects must follow such mandates in the jurisdiction where they operate. The guidance is aligned with FAO's environmental and social standards policy (2015) and is subject to revision as new evidence on COVID-19 propagation and impact assessments become available. This document should be read in conjunction with other FAO's policy briefs, specific guidance and other relevant publications and information sources.[1]

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[1] While the guidance mostly focuses on immediate impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on FAO's programming and outlines key environmental and social sustainability criteria, it does not replace the need for further work in developing a set of sustainability criteria for economic recovery interventions).

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL STANDARDS

Management of risk at programme and project levels

Policies and procedures

Measures aimed at preventing and mitigating COVID-19 impacts should be considered for ongoing projects to adapt existing work plans, but also have to be integrated in relevant categories of new projects addressing COVID-19 recovery. Projects should consider strengthening the protection of human health as a part of good agricultural practices and thus, developing specific policies and procedures for preventing, identifying, mitigating, and responding to instances of COVID-19 infections. These should be informed by the risk identification and mitigation process below and may include:

- prevention procedures covering basic hygiene, cleaning and disinfection, personal protective equipment (PPE), stakeholder engagement, supplier management, and visitor management;

- recommendations from national policies and procedures on how to determine and manage suspected and identified cases, including preventive and mitigation measures;

- updated working conditions policies, identifying labor market strategies and social protection programmes to reduce the impact of the outbreak, particularly on informal economy and recognizing rural women's role in food producing, processing and selling, as appropriate, and

- stakeholder engagement procedures where operations or changes to operations might affect the community.

Once developed, policies and procedures should be communicated clearly to the most affected and at-risk socio-economic groups, workers and, as applicable, to contractors/sub-contractors, workers in worker accommodation sites, visitors, customers, the supply chain, and the surrounding community. They should be reviewed in line with the latest advice and requirements from regional, national and international authorities. If current employment policies are too inadequate to provide protection and mitigate potential impacts in the case of illness of a worker or of a worker's family member, or in case of reduced or closed operations, projects should review and – if at all possible – update policies and procedures to cover these circumstances, including but not limited to sick leave, extended paid leave, leave for caretaking responsibilities, contractor payment terms, flexible working, etc.

It may be appropriate to develop and communicate a clear policy of non-discrimination to reduce stigma so that employees feel safe reporting illness or illness among family members. All policies and procedures should be clearly communicated alongside contact information and access to a grievance mechanism should employees have questions or concerns. It is imperative to adopt a gender-responsive approach to build the resilience of women and men so they can better respond to threats linked to COVID-19 and recover more quickly.

Risk identification and mitigation

Projects' risk logs and environmental and social standards checklists should be assessed to identify the risk of spreading infection in workplace, among the workforce, businesses, customers, and the community. This may result in or contribute to an Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan. This assessment will be unique to each project and should consider both structural and behavioral risks and mitigation measures.

If a project does not have a risk assessment process in place, then they can follow a hierarchy of control approach to identify and mitigate risks and develop a workplace plan to address COVID-19 that should include the following four categories of response measure:

- *personal hygiene*: promote and enforce frequent handwashing and respiratory hygiene; discourage touching eyes, nose, and mouth; ensure workplace is clean and hygienic, and regularly disinfect surfaces and objects; make hand sanitizer and/or ablution facilities with soap available in all areas where risk of transmission is identified (e.g. upon entry to the premises, in canteen, in toilets, etc.); where hand sanitizer is not available due to shortages, the importance of personal hygiene and the practice of proper handwashing with soap will be essential;

- *physical distancing*: where possible, reduce number of workers in the workplace to enable physical distancing, supported by appropriating additional space, e.g. conference rooms, to allow people to spread out; avoid customary social contact (e.g. handshakes);

- *measures at the workplace*: advise employees to stay at home when sick and to seek medical advice if they have a fever, cough and/or difficulty breathing; identify which workers can work from home, if possible, and provide them with the appropriate technology; encourage alternative methods for interaction where possible, for example phone calls instead of in-person meetings; companies that have fingerprint biometric systems should consider replacing them with card entry systems; where possible, consider use of infrared laser thermometers to check workers' and visitors' temperatures before entering the premises; develop measures to ensure the temporary transfer of responsibilities of affected personnel to their colleagues; identify areas of risk transmission through e.g. food preparation and engagement with the public and implement appropriate measures in line with international recommendations of personal protective equipment (PPE); companies with direct-to-consumer sales should consider hygiene practices when dealing with cash and products;

- *information dissemination*: stay informed and follow advice from international health organizations such as the WHO and national health organizations and the government; communicate good practices to workers and visitors in key areas, such as entry points or lavatories, through posters and signs as well as reminders from designated staff like receptionists; where possible, communicate with surrounding communities to confirm awareness of the virus and discuss good hygiene practices and precautionary measures; if restrictions on site access will affect the community, e.g. by closing access paths, clearly communicate this with community leaders and discuss the implications; provide information using different communication channels, with tailored messages for women on available social assistance programmes, hygiene, food safety and nutrition.

Stakeholder engagement

An integral part of FAO's environmental and social management is promoting meaningful and effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and target populations (both men and women) throughout the programming cycle, in particular with those who may be directly or indirectly affected by supported activities. Stakeholder engagement is an on-going process that involves to varying degrees: (i) stakeholder identification and analysis, (ii) planning of stakeholder engagement over the course of the programming, (iii) timely disclosure of relevant, accessible information on the programming activities, (iv) consultation and meaningful participation with adequate engagement of women and most vulnerable groups, (v) dispute resolution and addressing potential grievances, (vi) reporting to stakeholders, and (vi) inclusion of stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation.

Maintaining close communication channels with all stakeholders involved in the programme during the entire period of the COVID-19 crisis, in particular project beneficiaries in vulnerable groups (as identified in the Introduction section) as well as traders, buyers, cooperating partners and donors is crucial. All programme/project stakeholders should be informed of all decisions related to the programme as soon as possible, in order to maintain trust and keep operations going to the extent possible or allow operations to resume at the end of the current crisis. Projects should provide clear guidance about preventive measures and precautions to workers and, where applicable, contractors, the supply chain, customers, and the wider community, including information on:

- current status of COVID-19 and how it may impact the workforce and, as appropriate, other relevant stakeholders such as the company's clients;

- summary of how different areas of the business will operate and key risk mitigation priorities;

- actions being taken on different areas including travel, working from home, meetings, conferences, screening processes, physical distancing in the office, hygiene, and transportation;

- workers' rights including information on relevant flexibility in the workplace and protection including medical evidence requirements for sickness, sick leave and pay, working from home;

- if appropriate, and in close consultation with local health authorities, updates on any cases within the workforce and advice for anyone who might have come into contact with the affected individuals;

- what is needed from the workforce (mindset, hygiene, personal health);

- request workers to inform management of suspected cases within their families and social circles (respect national laws on data privacy);

- any new standards being implemented e.g. approvals for or cancellation of all non- essential travel and conferences;

- resources for any physical or mental health concerns, noting that this can be a stressful time;

- place pictorial guidance on symptoms of COVID-19 and good hygiene practices around project premises. Support these efforts with trainings as necessary.[2]

Disclosure

Disclosure of relevant project information helps stakeholders to participate effectively in the project-related decision-making processes. FAO is committed to disclose information in a timely manner, before appraisal formally begins, that is relevant, understandable, accessible to everyone and culturally appropriate, placing due attention to the specific needs of community groups which may be affected by project implementation (such as literacy, gender, disabilities, differences in language or accessibility of technical information or connectivity).

FAO is committed to undertake disclosure for all *moderate* and *high-risk* projects. In the case of high risk and some moderate risk projects, national or local legislation may specify disclosure requirements. Requirements in projects under Emergency preparedness and response are covered in the FAO In Emergencies Guidance Note on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) (FAO, 2013).

With the expected increase in the number and scope of FAO projects responding to the crisis, information disclosure becomes even more important to ensure that the public is informed about the activities and has means and tools to express COVID-19 related grievances.

In consultation with governments, projects could identify key messages about COVID-19 for specific audiences and the most effective methods to deliver these messages or issue local public health announcements and updated information on the outbreak and response. To take into account the limitations imposed by lockdowns and movement restrictions, projects will make an additional effort to use locally available digital channels and community media, collaborating with local champions, leaders and organizations.

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[2] The WHO has developed a variety of documents for this purpose:
https://www.who.int/westernpacific/news/multimedia/infographics/covid-19

Grievance redress mechanism

Stakeholders to FAO activities have a right to exercise their opinions, whether positive or negative, to the Organization that is responsible for actions that affect them. Addressing grievances early and effectively mitigates, manages and resolves problems and prevents their inflation. FAO and its partners have legal and moral obligations and stakeholders have rights, which must be recognized. A grievance mechanism helps to ensure that concerns are heard and addressed.

FAO projects shall ensure that parties affected by programming activities have equal access to effective, fair, transparent, and inclusive grievance redress and conflict resolution processes and mechanisms free of charge. All new and relevant existing projects are recommended to have grievance procedures in place adapted to COVID-19 related grievances. Project stakeholders, especially community members, should have an easy and accessible way to report grievances related to COVID-19, including different types of gender-based violence, and the grievances should be prioritized and resolved promptly. Projects can give attention to culturally appropriate and adapted awareness raising activities and feedback mechanisms that are particularly important to properly sensitize the communities and optimize grievance redress within a given project.

Implementation, monitoring and reporting

Where possible, project teams (especially lead technical officers) supported by country offices should gather relevant information on key food value chain parameters for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis, including sudden food price increases, regional trade dynamics and reduction of imported food, supply chain shortages, forecasted agricultural production, rate of post-harvest losses, labor shortages, various social vulnerability indicators (such as access to ecosystem, sanitary and health services; access to information and education during crisis; gender and age group disaggregated data on the increase in unemployment, and etc.), humanitarian context and others. This information is crucial to understand the implications of COVID-19 on the environmental and social risk profile of a project and necessary adjustments if warranted.

It is also important to collect disaggregated data and undertake analysis by sex, age, rural/urban groups, to assess the gendered impact of lockdowns on rural women and men in order to design differentiated preventive and response measures and develop robust gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting frameworks. This implies to conduct gender analysis and address gender issues in vulnerability assessments and rapid/fast track interventions to take into account the roles and responsibilities of men and women and their specific constraints and opportunities.

Project teams are advised to develop project-relevant contingency plans and identify thresholds/triggers for the rapid adjustment of operations, particularly regarding the following aspects:

- *Community engagement*: In a context of active transmission in-country, community engagement will be crucial to contain the spread of the disease and reduce fear, misinformation, confusion, tension. This implies to ensure women's adequate engagement and investing in their leadership and negotiation skills so they can participate in planning, implementing and monitoring the response. FAO projects (e.g. those working with community forest user groups and producer organizations, farmer field schools and junior farmer field and life schools, Dimitra Clubs and other community-based instruments) could be leveraged as platforms to disseminate sensitization messages at community level. Such messages should be disseminated in simple/local language, taking into consideration local cultural, as well as special needs of the different members of the marginalized communities, including those who can be harder to reach, such as women, youth, children and migrant workers in agri-food systems (particularly seasonal and informal workers) as well as older people.

- *Protection of communities and vulnerable groups*: In a context of active transmission in-country, relevant FAO emergency projects should identify particularly vulnerable beneficiaries and

disseminate secure sensitive information among affected persons or communities.

- *Project beneficiary targeting and re-prioritization*: Access/movement restrictions may affect FAO's ability to reach its beneficiaries, prompting a revision of the targeting and prioritization criteria, ensuring to leave no one behind and not exacerbate existing inequalities. In a context of active transmission in country and where it is not absolutely critical/necessary for operational reasons, personal data collection should be avoided. Such measures should be communicated (to affected populations, partners, and FAO staff) ahead of time, while ensuring that data protection principles continue to be respected.

- *Project/programme criticality*: FAO's regional/country offices may review and adjust project/programme criticality to ensure priority is given to life-saving activities in case FAO is unable to continue all its regular operations (e.g., food assistance, social protection and safety nets, humanitarian assistance, extreme weather, pests and diseases outbreaks, and conflict- affected populations, etc.).

All adjustments to operations should be aligned with country-specific guidance prepared by the relevant health authorities and partners (such as Ministries of Health, WHO), national-level emergency preparedness and response plans, as well as inter-agency agreements and decisions.

ESS 1: Natural resource management

A.   Management of soil and land resources

Landscape changes – both permanent changes due to, for example, deforestation, mining or urbanization or temporary changes due to flooding or drought – are key drivers of the emergence and re-emergence of a number of zoonotic diseases.[3] The expansion and intensification of economic activities such as husbandry, agriculture, fishing, infrastructure development, mining and logging drive animal species into marginal environments and increase human-wildlife interactions. Promotion of sustainable land management, including forest and wildlife management and maintenance of healthy and biodiverse ecosystems, require global efforts to reduce or prevent future disease outbreaks from wild animals.

Rural people increasingly face the challenge of having to adapt their production systems in the context of climate change and natural resource depletion. Women depend more on natural resources for their livelihood, have fewer endowments and entitlements to help them absorb any new risk or shock. It is also important to recognize women's role in natural resources conservation and their local knowledge, which can help designing appropriate conservation and mitigation measures.

While relevant landscape conservation activities typically are not considered as high priority activities during and in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are the basis for reducing future risks of zoonotic diseases and can be buffers to immediate impacts on food security. In natural habitats, FAO projects should strive to avoid conversion or degradation and proceed with activities that could cause adverse impacts to such areas or on already vulnerable socioeconomic groups, only if no viable alternatives exist and if appropriate conservation and mitigation measures or plans are in place, including those required to maintain potentially affected ecosystem services.

FAO discourages financing or execution of projects related to infrastructure or other types of physical investments involving land use and/or water space that would cause significant adverse impacts to legally protected areas, areas designated for legal protection, and areas recognized for their high biodiversity value and their buffer zones, including nationally and internationally designated protected areas, indigenous protected areas (IPAs) or indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCAs). Activities in these areas need to be consistent with the area's legal protection and management objectives and plans,

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[3] A zoonotic disease is any disease or infection that is naturally transmissible from vertebrate animals to humans.

where existent.

Appropriate risk mitigation and management measures shall aim to achieve net gains of biodiversity for critical habitats and, wherever possible, for natural habitats, ensuring a minimum no net loss of biodiversity for such areas. However, it must be recognized that no net loss is not possible in all cases, such as areas where endemic species have highly restricted distributions. In such instances, projects should explore alternative designs to avoid adverse impacts on biodiversity. Risk identification shall and address the following elements:

- consideration of potential direct and indirect impacts on biodiversity, ecosystems, ecosystem services, natural habitats and genetic resources from supported activities as early as possible;

- consideration of risks related to habitat and species loss, degradation and fragmentation, overexploitation, invasive alien species, hydrological changes, nutrient loading, pollution, incidental take, potential climate change impacts, and differing values attached to potentially affected biodiversity and ecosystem services by potentially affected communities and other stakeholders taking into account the differential impacts on men and women;

- consideration of potential impacts across landscapes and seascapes to ensure that any adopted mitigation strategy aligns with regional conservation goals; and

- consideration of the risk of procurement of natural resource commodities contributing to significant conversion or degradation of natural habitats.

- consideration of the risk of weakened forest governance contributing to an increase in illegal activities, putting at risk conservation of natural resources and the rights of vulnerable populations.

Most agriculture and natural resource management projects involve some changes in land use or the building of new infrastructure. Tenure, by defining access and security of rights to land and other natural resources, affects how farmers or other users decide to use the natural resource, who has the right and the incentives to invest in improvements and, sometimes, who will benefit from improvements in productivity, or who may lose from changes in use and access to the natural resources, analyzing the gender implications.

Sustainable soil management is an essential element of sustainable agriculture and provides a valuable lever for sustainable intensification, climate regulation and a pathway for safeguarding ecosystem services and biodiversity. FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM) elaborate on the principles outlined in the revised World Soil Charter by providing general technical and policy recommendations on sustainable soil management (FAO, 2017).

Some of the key elements of sustainable soil management according to the VGSSM are as follows:

- minimizing soil erosion;

- enhancement of soil organic carbon content;

- fostering soil nutrient balance and cycles;

- prevention, minimization and mitigation of soil salinization and alkalinization;

- prevention and minimization of contamination and acidification;

- preservation and enhancement of soil biodiversity, and

- minimization of soil sealing.

B.   Management of water resources and small dams

FAO projects should seek to avoid adverse impacts on water resources and water-related ecosystems,

including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes, and promote sustainable use of water resources through integrated water resources management approaches. It will ensure that supported activities do not adversely affect access to and and/or the quality of water supplies and can help address existing gender inequalities and discrimination against women in water resources management.

C.   Tenure

FAO projects will have to address the tenure and administration dimensions of the changes that they may provoke, including issues of security of tenure and access to natural resources, compensation, administration or land governance. This should be done in accordance with the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) (FAO, 2012). The VGGT are the standard for use in all FAO's work on tenure and all units at headquarters and decentralized offices are expected to honor this commitment and to apply the VGGT in their work programmes. COVID-19 may have indirect impacts on ensuring land tenure issues, especially in food crises when the existing tenure and access to natural resources could be compromised.

D.   Climate

FAO's climate change standard aims to strengthen resilience of communities to address risks of climate change impacts and disasters, ensure that FAO programming integrates climate change mitigation and adaptation considerations; and does not exacerbate the existing inequalities and the vulnerability of communities to climate change impacts or disaster risks; and minimizes programming-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and intensity and maintains carbon sinks.

Extreme weather and climate events occur in parallel with the COVID-19 pandemic. In the event of major natural disasters, a larger number of people will be affected due to the increasing vulnerabilities of livelihoods superimposed on the social, economic and public health impacts of COVID-19. It is reasonable to expect that national capacities to respond to disasters during COVID- 19 will be reduced, particularly in health and emergency services. As a result, preparedness and response measures of governments during this time may trigger reduced investments in disaster risk reduction and preparedness.

FAO projects and programmes that were designed to address climate vulnerability as a major objective could be re-assessed based on the increasing number of people at risk from food insecurity, with limited capacity to cope with climate-induced hazards. Proposed interventions must be gender-responsive and address the different needs of men and women, ensuring their equal access to technologies and practices.

Food emergency response projects may introduce changes into screening tools and checklists to consider issues related to pandemic preparedness and early action interventions would need to take into account pandemic-related restrictions (such as new protocols for physical distancing in operations responding to disasters and emergencies linked to natural disasters) and impacts on food systems (health, safety, markets, access), the increased use of remote-sensing methods would be required for areas affected by travel and mobility restrictions.

Projects which build and maintain safety net systems for the most vulnerable are critical for protecting people from disasters, especially at times of compounded crises. FAO projects should avoid re-allocation of resources away from climate-informed safety net interventions.

COVID-19 messages can be integrated into the existing communication channels during and in the aftermath of disasters to promote social and behavioral change for COVID-19 risk mitigation and protection measures.

E.   Medical waste

Special considerations are applied to management of solid municipal and medical waste, especially

regarding transport and disposal.

ESS 2: Biodiversity, ecosystems and natural Habitats

Closely interlinked, biodiversity and ecosystem services support agriculture in multiple ways, benefitting farmers' livelihoods and well-being. FAO requires that biodiversity and ecosystem services are maintained or enhanced and is committed to integrating their sustainable management into its crops, forestry, wildlife, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture practices. Conserving and using a wide range of diversity – both among species and within species – means securing options to respond to future challenges. FAO works closely with international biodiversity-related conventions and instruments, particularly the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

To tackle the complex and interrelated issues associated with wildlife habitat disruption, biodiversity loss and the spread of zoonotic diseases, FAO i) Supports and scales up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the loss and degradation of ecosystems and restore degraded ecosystems worldwide; ii) Supports national governments to prevent and mitigate human-wildlife conflicts, through addressing the social, political and cultural root causes of them and taking into account different values local people attach to these conflicts; and iii) Helps indigenous peoples to secure and exercise their territorial rights to sustainably manage the natural resources they depend on for food, income and cultural identity.

ESS 3: Plant genetic resources for food and agriculture

The conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture is at the core of food security and nutrition. Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA) include the accessions of crop germplasm (*ex-situ* collections), wild relatives of crops found in nature (in situ); landraces or traditional crop varieties maintained on-farm; breeding materials in crop improvement programs; and improved crop varieties registered and/or released for cultivation. Any action that would narrow the diversity of PGRFA or otherwise exact negative impacts on ecosystem functions which biodiversity provides – both in the action's immediate footprint and in its wider area-of-influence – may be cause for additional risks. Possible risks to forest genetic resources and other wood plant species should be considered separately, if necessary, as they are not included in PGRFA.

One of the immediate priorities of humanitarian actors in a COVID-19 context will be to ensure that ongoing deliveries of critical assistance to vulnerable groups are not hindered and are adapted to potential COVID-19 impacts. For FAO, this means preserving and protecting the agricultural livelihoods and food security of vulnerable populations, including by adapting programming and operational delivery:

- Continuing and scaling-up (as needed) distributions of agricultural inputs (seeds, tools, livestock feed) and provision of animal health support to ensure continuous food production and income generation in the most vulnerable areas, including within the rural-urban interface, ensuring equal benefits for women and men;

- Supporting livelihood diversification and home-based food production to ensure further fresh food availability (e.g. distribution of small stock, distribution of tools and quality seeds and saplings for home gardening including bio-fortified seeds) and income; reducing post-harvest losses, which are likely to substantially increase due to limitations in transport and access to markets, through improved storage capacities and small scale processing and conservation of fruits, vegetables, milk and meat products, etc., as well as ensuring food quality and safety along the value chain; and

- Supporting food production in IDP/refugee camps and host communities to protect food availability (e.g. distribution of small stock, distribution of tools and seeds for small-scale agricultural production of nutrient-dense crops) and improving access to food and healthy diets, as well as scaling-up cash-based programmes.

ESS 4: Animal - livestock and aquatic - genetic resources for food and agriculture

FAO is engaged in the primary production of living natural resources, including crops, animal husbandry, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries. Projects should ensure sustainable management of livestock and aquatic natural resources in accordance with article 10 of the CBD. During COVID-19, projects should continue applying appropriate industry-specific best management practices and, where codified, credible certification and verification systems, adopt appropriate measures, where relevant, to promote animal welfare, control for potential invasiveness or the escape of production species, and minimization of antimicrobial resistance. Where relevant, support small-scale landholders to harvest and produce livestock and aquatic species in a sustainable manner. There are critical health and occupational risks associated with livestock and aquaculture sectors during and in the aftermath of the pandemics (see recommendations on ESS 7: Decent Work).

The following general recommendations for reducing the risk of transmission of zoonotic pathogens in live animal markets apply:

- Anyone visiting live animal markets, wet markets, or animal product markets should practice general hygiene measures, including regular hand washing with soap and water after touching animals and animal products, avoiding touching eyes, nose, or mouth with hands, and avoiding contact with sick animals or spoiled animal products. Any contact with other animals possibly living in the market (e.g. stray cats and dogs, rodents, birds, bats) should be avoided. Attention should also be taken to avoid contact with potentially contaminated animal waste or fluids on the soil or structures of shops and market facilities.

- The consumption of raw or undercooked animal products should be avoided. Raw meat, milk, or animal organs should be handled with care, to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods, as per good food safety practices.

Recommendations for people working in these markets:

- Slaughterhouse workers, veterinarians in charge of animal and food inspection in markets, market workers, and those handling live animals and animal products should practice good personal hygiene, including frequent hand washing. They should consider wearing protective gowns and gloves while professionally handling animals and fresh animal products. Equipment and working stations should be disinfected frequently, at least once a day. Protective clothing should be removed after work and washed daily. Workers should avoid exposing family members to soiled work clothing, shoes, or other items. It is therefore recommended that protective clothes and items remain at the workplace for daily washing.

- As a general recommendation, sick animals should never be slaughtered for consumption; dead animals should be safely buried or destroyed and contact with their body fluids should be avoided unless wearing protective clothes. Veterinarians should maintain a high level of vigilance and report any unusual event detected in any animal species present in the markets to veterinary authorities.

ESS 5: Pest and pesticide management

During COVID-19, FAO activities should continue to seek to avoid use of pesticides in supported activities. Where unavoidable, projects should utilize Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approaches. If pesticide use is deemed necessary after having considered alternatives, they should adopt safe, effective and environmentally sound pesticide management in accordance with the WHO/FAO International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management (and its supporting technical guidelines that are drawn up by a WHO/FAO expert panel and expand on specific articles) for the safe labelling, packaging, handling, storage, application and disposal of pesticides.

Project proponents should consider carefully hazards and select least toxic pesticides that are known to be effective, have minimal effects on non-target species and the environment, and minimize risks associated with development of resistance in pests and vectors.

ESS 6: Involuntary resettlement and displacement

FAO projects shall seek to avoid involuntary resettlement in supported activities wherever possible, especially during times of crises and emergency. However, FAO may be called upon to support partner activities that could lead to involuntary resettlement of individuals or communities. Activities that lead to involuntary resettlement shall be undertaken only in exceptional circumstances for the purpose of promoting the general welfare with full justification, will be reasonable and proportional, and will provide appropriate forms of compensation, assistance, legal protection and information according to the benchmark standards herein, with special attention to ensuring such activities do not exacerbate impoverishment risks of marginalized and disadvantaged groups and individuals. Where displacement leads to significant adverse impacts, programming should support the economic and social reconstruction of affected persons' lives and livelihoods. Physical distancing, travel and mobility restrictions could make involuntary resettlement and community displacement not feasible or practicable.

During COVID-19 and in its aftermath, FAO projects shall:

- avoid, or where avoidance is not possible, minimize and mitigate adverse impacts from land or resource acquisition or restrictions on land or resource use;

- prohibit forced evictions;

- enhance and restore the livelihoods and living standards of all displaced persons and improve the living conditions and overall socioeconomic status of the poor and displaced persons belonging to marginalized or disadvantaged groups;

- conceive and execute resettlement activities as sustainable development programs, providing sufficient resources to enable displaced persons to benefit directly from programming activities;

- ensure that resettlement activities are planned and implemented collaboratively with the meaningful and participation of those affected;

- recognize all land and natural resource users with legitimate claims, including people having informal/customary rights and provide policy advice to achieve gender-equitable land tenure.

ESS 7: Decent work [including community health, safety and security]

A.   Creation of more and better employment opportunities, especially for women and youth

FAO projects and programmes shall actively contribute to the realization of the right to work, especially for groups of the population that are more severely affected by unemployment and underemployment, such as women and youth. In particular, FAO projects and programmes will actively promote opportunities to increase human capital and skills development thanks to technical and vocational education and training (TVET), promote entrepreneurship and support the growth of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

The ILO estimates that the employment contraction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has already begun on a large scale in many countries, with an estimated decline so far equivalent to 195 million full-time

workers (ILO, 2020). Informal workers and specific vulnerable groups, such as women and youth, are going to be particularly affected by loss of jobs and incomes and therefore need dedicated attention.

During COVID-19 and in its aftermath, FAO projects shall:

- support the design of, or facilitate access to, stimulus packages that aim to sustain jobs and the economy, i.e. for micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including advisory services and targeted rural finance measures (recovery grants, soft loans and insurance) for them to sustain economic viable businesses, re-invent or adapt them (i.e. by acquiring equipment to manage post-harvest losses or accessing new distribution channels);

- promote market linkages and shorter supply chains (e.g. introduce vegetable delivery sourced from local producers) or support small-scale producers' access to virtual marketplaces, in order to innovate in terms of distribution channels. Consider the provision of passes to ease the logistics issues under the restrictions of movement;

- facilitate matching platforms of labour demand and supply in the agri-food system. Where possible, provide online and via phone job search counselling and intermediation;

- provide gender and age-sensitive distance tutoring and training on agri-food systems, value addition, online marketing, business resilience and innovation, and green jobs related skills. Learning programmes adapted into multimedia formats should be rolled out through locally available digital channels and community media (e.g. use radios where the internet is not available), partnering with local champions, leaders and organizations as intermediaries.

B.   Non-discrimination and equal opportunity

Decent work involves opportunities for productive work that delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, to organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men (ILO, 1999).

All FAO projects commit to respect the core labour standard of the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. Direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 present specific challenges to ensure compliance with this particular standard.

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have significant impacts in terms of unemployment and underemployment, especially on informal workers. In developing countries, over 90 percent of agricultural workers are informal. Particularly difficult is the situation of wageworkers in the agricultural sector, who represent nearly half of the total agricultural labour force, but remain largely invisible to policy and decision-makers. They are already among the poorest workers and often employed on a seasonal, casual or temporary basis. This makes them even more vulnerable to the economic shocks brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Informal workers in the agriculture and food supply sector are at risk of losing their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, even though these are considered essential systems that should remain operational. Many informal workers in the agriculture and rural sectors may expose themselves and their families to additional risks and vulnerability. Rural women will be hit harder by the social and economic impacts of the crisis. Other groups of workers, such as youth, indigenous peoples and migrant workers, could also be disproportionately affected. Young people are twice as likely as adults to be in temporary employment; in rural areas, young people are 40 percent more likely to be in casual wage work without a contract. Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities are also disproportionately represented among informal workers, especially in agriculture, and are particularly marginalized. Many migrant workers are also under informal or irregular arrangements, which leave them vulnerable to exploitation, poverty and food insecurity and often without access to healthcare, social protection and measures being put in place by governments. In addition, the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is

likely to also affect their families in home countries through a sudden reduction or halt in remittance flows.

COVID-19 containment measures restrict movement of people (internally and across borders) and could potentially lead to labour shortages in agricultural value chains, affecting food availability, accessibility and affordability, as well as market prices globally.

Projects providing resources aimed at mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 need to go directly into the hands of people to ensure support reaches those entirely dependent on the informal economy and countries less able to respond. Specific measures such as cash transfers, credits and loans must target women. FAO's response should focus on protecting workers at the workplace, expanding temporary work permits and ensuring safe mobility within and across countries, matching labour demand and supply, while protecting lives and livelihoods and supporting employment and incomes for the most vulnerable, including migrants. Migrants are particularly vulnerable as they often work under informal and casual arrangements without access to national health and social protection systems.

Labor market strategies and social protection programmes are required to reduce the impact of the outbreak, recognizing rural women's key role in producing, processing and selling food products. Response measures during COVID-19 should expand social protection coverage to informal workers in agriculture and rural sectors. Efforts should be made to maintain agricultural supply chains and strengthen the market linkages for local producers, while promoting decent work. Specific measures should be tailored towards women workers with care responsibilities at home, families that may resort to child labour as a coping strategy, as well as other vulnerable subgroups.

FAO is committed to protecting migrant workers in its projects, such as those in which trainings or livelihood interventions are foreseen (for example, through virtual learning, physical distancing, provision of personal protective equipment, access to water and sanitizer, etc.). During and in the aftermath of COVID-19, FAO projects should support the following protection measures adjusted to national- and project-related circumstances:

- extend expiring working visas of migrant and seasonal agricultural workers employed in all agricultural sub-sectors to alleviate potential labour shortages and reducing the possibility of spreading the virus to other areas upon their return. Regularization and issuance of temporary work permits to undocumented migrants or those migrants who, under certain circumstances, cannot work (e.g. asylum seekers) will also ensure that they have access to healthcare, support services and social protection measures to mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19;

- promote online appeals or other forms of labour matching, giving the opportunity to all migrants present in the country, especially those who lost their jobs due to business closures, to access jobs in the agri-food systems. Promote social dialogue and consultations with producers' organizations to put in place dedicated measures to support smallholder/family farmers and small-medium agricultural enterprises that may face several constraints (e.g. no or limited access to information, ICTs, lack of labour);

- ensure the inclusion of all migrants in the pandemic response and in the measures that are being introduced to mitigate the economic recession caused by COVID-19, regardless of the migratory or working status. Migrants should be given equitable access to prevention, detection and treatment measures;

- eocial protection, income smoothing and employment retention measures should be expanded to cover all vulnerable populations, including all migrants. Particular attention needs to be placed on the most vulnerable sub-groups, including women, youth and children (including parental care support for migrants working in essential services), older migrant workers with co-morbidities (such as HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis, diabetes, disability), and on unprotected workers, including the self-employed, contract workers, contributing family workers, casual, seasonal, and informal workers, and gig workers in the food and agricultural sub- sectors;

- time-bound financial and tax relief need to extend to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in all agricultural sub-sectors owned by migrants;

- provide temporary compensation in the form of in-kind food/vouchers or targeted cash transfers to informal workers who are not able to work, or universal one-off cash payments. In addition to using existing systems and databases that are inclusive of information on informal workers or setting simplified online mechanisms to apply for the emergency aid, engage with informal workers' organizations and other community grassroots organizations to improve targeting;

- ensure that social protection measures form part of a package of measures including health and hygiene support, and relieving the working poor from loan repayments, rent and utilities payments. Package the above-mentioned measures with sustainable financial measures (micro loans, micro insurance, group loans, etc.) to assist informal workers' financial recovery while protecting them from the loan debt trap after the crisis;

- invite, support and monitor employers of wage farm workers to guarantee increased sick pay, protection and information for workers in the fields.

- provide targeted support to women workers with care responsibilities at home, families that may resort to child labour as a coping strategy, as well as to other vulnerable groups of informal workers. The support could include targeted cash, food or in-kind distributions, as well as distance support (e.g. radio campaigns) to raise awareness and listen to their needs;

- include women and youth in response and recovery decision-making, e.g. by leveraging the capacities of their organizations or leaders;

- ensure that messages about the importance of maintaining children in schools and protecting them from hazardous child labour are consistently disseminated. Those who are vulnerable have less access to information;

- liaise with community organizations to disseminate up-to-date health information related to COVID-19.

C.   Occupational safety and health (OSH)

FAO's programming target improvements in social and economic opportunities and outcomes for individuals and communities. This may include support for State obligations to promote the right to health and enhancing employment, economic growth, education, social protection and services. Programming activities can however also increase beneficiary and community exposure to health, safety and security hazards and impacts. Potential negative impacts affecting health, safety and security including different forms of gender-based violence may arise from a broad range of supported activities, including from infrastructure development and construction activities, changes in the nature and volume of traffic and transportation, water and sanitation issues, use and management of hazardous materials and chemicals, impacts on natural resources and ecosystems, the influx of project/programme labour, and potential abuses by security personnel.

Occupational safety and health professionals use a framework called the "hierarchy of controls" to select ways of dealing with workplace hazards. The hierarchy of controls prioritizes intervention strategies based on the premise that the best way to control a hazard is to remove it systematically from the workplace, rather than relying on employees to reduce their exposure. In the setting of a pandemic, this hierarchy should be used in concert with current public health recommendations.

The types of measures that may be used to protect the project, including its workers, stakeholders and public are listed below. Most employers will use a combination of control methods. There are advantages and disadvantages to each type of control measure when considering the ease of implementation, effectiveness, and cost.

For example, hygiene and physical distancing can be implemented relatively easily and with little expense, but this control method requires employees to modify and maintain their behavior, which may be difficult to sustain. On the other hand, installing clear plastic barriers will be more expensive and take a longer time to implement, although in the long run may be more effective at preventing transmission during a pandemic. Projects must evaluate their particular workplace to develop a plan for protecting their employees that may combine both immediate actions as well as longer term solutions.

FAO projects should have the necessary processes and measures that address the safety and health of workers during COVID-19 pandemics. The processes and measures may be implemented through the responsible party's occupational safety and health management system and shall address:

- identification and assessment of potential hazards and risks posed by COVID-19, particularly those that could result in serious injury, ill health or death and those identified through worker health surveillance;

- the elimination of hazards and minimization of COVID-19 risks through the implementation of preventive and protective measures implemented in the following order of priority: elimination or substitution, engineering and organizational controls, administrative controls, and where residual hazards and risks cannot be controlled through these collective measures, provision of personal protective equipment at no cost to the worker;

- safety and health training, including on the proper use and maintenance of personal protective equipment, at no cost to workers conducted by competent persons and the maintenance of training records;

- recording and notification of occupational accidents and incidents and any resulting injuries, ill health or death;

- emergency prevention and preparedness and response arrangements to emergency situations; and

- employment injury benefits and/or remedies for adverse impacts such as occupational injuries, disability, ill health or disease and death.[4]

Ensure occupational safety and health measures are put in place and are accessible to all migrants. Personal protective equipment and related items should be distributed to all workers employed in indispensable services, including those working in the food and agricultural sector. Ensure adequate hygiene and sanitation is provided and physical distancing is respected at the workplace (such as fishing vessels, farms, fish/farm markets), in housing for migrant agricultural workers (when provided by employers or the state), and on the means of transportation required to reach the fields/workplaces in remote rural areas. Conducting information and awareness-raising campaigns on how to protect oneself and others from the risk of COVID-19 infection need to be made accessible in languages and communication channels/formats that are understandable and accessible to all migrant workers.

Workers involved in the livestock and food (especially animal) processing sector have a higher risk of being exposed to COVID-19. The following specific measures are recommended to reduce the exposure during the time of pandemics and beyond in these sectors:

- minimizing the exposure of humans and livestock to wildlife-related pathogens all along the wild meat supply chain by promoting back-yard production of poultry, fish and edible insects in peri-urban areas around provincial towns to ensure a sustainable supply of alternative sources of protein to wild meat; use targeted social marketing campaigns to change consumer behavior in large cities to reduce both individual and aggregate demand for wild caught animals;

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[4] These would include for example necessary insurance arrangements that ensure access to health benefits and replacement of loss of earnings in case of a work-related injury, namely in case of death or an illness due to work.

- use appropriate slaughter techniques to minimize food safety risks: animal waste, their hooves, hides and feathers are additional important sources of occupational exposure and the contamination of meat and other animal products. The location where animals are held prior to slaughter can become contaminated and serve not only as a source of infection to the animals and contamination of their hides and feathers but may contaminate the cages or pens from which pathogens may be aerosolized;

- ensure proper cleaning and the prevention of cross-contamination of the equipment: knives, saws, transport containers and conveyer belts made of metal, plastic and wood should be decontaminated. Most pathogens, including coronaviruses, are susceptible to destruction and removal with most common disinfectants and sanitizers used in food processing. A 0.05% hypochlorite solution, equivalent to a 1:100 dilution of household bleach is effective at killing most pathogens and can be used to disinfect surfaces after they are cleaned. It is important to follow manufacturers' recommendations for disinfectant use, notably the need to remove first organic matter that can inhibit contact and neutralize the efficacy of disinfectants; the dilution of the disinfectant; and the contact time required to be effective. If alcohol is used as a disinfectant, it should contain a final concentration of alcohol between 60 and 85%. Of note is that most commercially available spirits distilled for beverages do not contain an adequate concentration of alcohol to be effective as a sanitizer for the hands or the environment;

- maintain personal and good hygiene practices when handling foods that may be consumed raw and without any further processing such as fresh fruits and vegetables and ready-to-use foods that are to be consumed without further heat treatment. To minimize risk of exposure to any foodborne bacteria and viruses, it is important to keep raw and cooked foods separated and use clean water;

- adequately heat-treat and protect from recontamination foods of animal origin. Although foodborne transmission of COVID-19 has not been reported, avoiding raw and undercooked foods of animal origin (meat, eggs, milk) products will reduce exposure to all viruses and other foodborne pathogens. Reaching an internal temperature of (70°C) is sufficient to kill COVID-19 virus and any other pathogens in meat. Both prior to and after cooking, meats should always be stored in a way that cannot contaminate other foods and that cannot be re-contaminated after cooking. The adequate cooking of frozen food is necessary as viruses could survive freezing. [5]

People living in large workers camps and camp-like settings (hereinafter called collective sites) can be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, mainly because of the health risks associated with movement/migration and living in crowded places. They are often faced with specific challenges and vulnerabilities that must be taken into consideration when planning for readiness and response operations for the COVID-19 outbreak. In such cases, consider one or more of the following measures:

- prevent infected persons from entering workers' accommodations areas, and if applicable or necessary, quarantine these persons per local regulations and/or recommendations from relevant international organizations;

- promote, respect, and enforce the occupancy density limits in workers' accommodation.

- in case new staff are arriving from countries or areas with a high risk of COVID-19, ensure that these persons are adequately quarantined per local regulations and/or recommendations from relevant international organizations;

- wherever possible, the housing coordinator or the person(s) in charge of managing the

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[5] The *Codex Alimentarius* Commission has adopted several practical guidelines on how to apply and implement best practices to ensure food hygiene (Codex General Principles of Food Hygiene, CXC 1- 1969), handle meats (Codex Code of Hygienic Practice for Meat, CXC 58 – 2005), and control viruses in foods (Guidelines for the Application of General Principles of Food Hygiene to the Control of Viruses in Food (CAC/GL 79-2012).

accommodation should coordinate the daily taking and recording of residents' temperatures;

- when accommodation houses people at high risk of developing fatal complications from COVID-19, consider providing them with separate housing. In this context persons aged 65 years or older, or those with high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes, are considered at high risk;

- ensure that all workers have access to medical professionals. Remove any language barriers;

- handwashing soap should be made available for the workers in all bathrooms. Everyone should follow a strict cleaning and housekeeping routine daily;

- doorknobs, faucets, TV sets / media equipment, kitchen equipment, controls, buttons, and any other object in common areas that are regularly touched must be cleaned several times per day. Frequency is to be determined by each facility;

- common surfaces, including ones in vehicles transporting workers from their accommodations to the workplace, counters, floors, and walls, should be treated as potentially contaminated and be cleaned regularly as described above;

- wash bed linen at least once a week;

- clean/replace AC filters at least monthly;

- minimize the number of people in a room and increase, as far as possible, the distance between beds to over 2 meters;

- maximize natural or forced ventilation within the limitations of comfort, security, and privacy. Consider changes in the facility to allow for ventilation during working hours;

- allow or prepare additional accommodation for workers who are stranded due to travel restrictions and who cannot be repatriated.

People living in collective sites may include internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, refugees and returnees, and migrants.[6] It is of extreme importance from a protection, human rights and public health standpoint, that people affected by humanitarian crises are included in all COVID-19 outbreak readiness and response strategies, plan and operations. There is a strong public health rationale to extend all measures to everyone, regardless of status and ensuring that:

- they are not scapegoated, stigmatized or otherwise targeted with specific, discriminatory measures;

- are provided with timely and accurate information in accessible forms and appropriate languages, and

- are involved in the design of readiness and response plans, policies and strategies and incentivized, including, for example, through the declaration of temporary amnesties, to fully participate.

Travel restrictions may be put in place by individual governments and may be applied to refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs and migrants. Close monitoring is required to ensure that these do not unduly affect the right to access territory and seek asylum, that there is no refoulement based on real or perceived fears of COVID-19 transmission, and that restrictions on freedom of movement, or other measures instituted by governments, are applied to refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs and migrants in a non-discriminatory way and in a way that protects their health and wellbeing, including mental health considerations.

FAO projects should put in place mechanisms (such as due diligence, audits) to ascertain that third parties who engage workers are legitimate and reliable entities and have in place human resources management

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[6] Further adaptations are needed for some population groups, including those living in slums.

policies and processes to address COVID-19 OSH requirements. COVID-19 provisions could be incorporated into the requirements of contractual agreements with third parties, together with appropriate noncompliance remedies. In the case of subcontracting, FAO projects should require such third parties to include equivalent requirements and remedies in their contractual agreements with subcontractors.

FAO projects shall identify potential risks of violations of supplier workers' fundamental rights[7] and safety and health issues which may arise in relation to primary suppliers (at a minimum), requiring the primary supplier to identify and mitigate those risks (OECD and FAO, 2016). They should establish roles and responsibilities for monitoring primary suppliers. If child labour or forced labour cases or breaches of other fundamental rights are identified because of COVID-19 restrictions and impacts, require the primary supplier to take appropriate steps to remedy them. Primary suppliers of FAO projects should be required to introduce procedures and mitigation measures to address safety and health issues related to COVID-19. Such procedures and mitigation measures shall be reviewed periodically to ascertain their effectiveness. IDB-Invest guidance on assessing the health and safety risk profiles of primary suppliers related to the COVID-19 pandemics is a useful resource in this regard.

The following recommendations are widely applicable in the workplace with confirmed cases of COVID-19 and could be recommended for FAO's primary suppliers and project beneficiaries:

1.   Minimize chance of exposure

- Any worker showing symptoms of respiratory illness (fever + cold or cough) and who has potentially been exposed to COVID-19 should be immediately removed from the site and tested for the virus at the nearest local hospital.

- Close co-workers and those sharing accommodation with such a worker should also be removed from the site and tested.

- Project management must identify the closest hospital that has testing facilities in place, refer workers, and pay for the test if it is not free.

- Persons under investigation for COVID-19 should not return to work at the project site until cleared by test results. During this time, they should continue to be paid daily wages.

- If a worker is found to have COVID-19, wages should continue to be paid during the worker's convalescence (whether at home or in a hospital).

- If project workers live at home, any worker with a family member who has a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 should be quarantined from the project site for 14 days, and should continue to be paid daily wages, even if they have no symptoms.

2.   Training of staff and precautions

- Train all staff on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, how it is spread, how to protect themselves and about the need to be tested if staff have symptoms. Allow Q&A and dispel any myths.

- Use existing grievance procedures to encourage reporting of co-workers if they show outward symptoms, such as ongoing and severe coughing with fever, and do not voluntarily submit to testing.

- Supply face masks and other relevant PPE to all project workers at the entrance to the project site. Any persons with signs of respiratory illness that is not accompanied by fever should be mandated to wear a face mask.

- Provide hand wash facilities, hand soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizer and mandate their use on

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[7] Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; the abolition of child and forced labour and non-discrimination and equal opportunity.

entry and exit of the project site and during breaks, via the use of simple signs with images in local languages.

- Train all workers in respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette and hand hygiene using demonstrations and participatory methods.

- Train cleaning staff in effective cleaning procedures and disposal of rubbish.

3.   Managing access and spread

- Should a case of COVID-19 be confirmed in a worker on the project site, visitors should be restricted from the site and worker groups should be isolated from each other as much as possible.

- Extensive cleaning procedures with high-alcohol content cleaners should be undertaken in the area of the site where the worker was present, prior to any further work being undertaken in that area.

D. Food security and healthy, balanced diets

The COVID-19 pandemic is posing risks to household food security in terms of availability, accessibility and/or affordability of healthy and balanced diets. Current reports suggest that value chains for staple crops such as wheat, maize, and rice are at less risk while high-value commodities such as fresh fruit and vegetables, milk and dairy products are at greater risk from disruptions because of the global strategic supplies of the former and the high resource needs and short shelf life of the latter. Potential risks should be avoided, minimized and mitigated to ensure that no agreed trade-off will jeopardize the nutritional status and health of the people, especially the most vulnerable individuals.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, all projects that support dietary patterns and nutrition should promote all dimensions of individuals' health and wellbeing, have low environmental pressure and impact; be accessible, affordable, safe and equitable; and culturally acceptable (FAO and WHO, 2019). In line with these principles, FAO's projects should avoid or minimize the impact of lockdowns and quarantines on planting, harvesting, food processing and access to markets for both suppliers and consumers while supporting capacities to continue producing and delivering affordable, adequate, safe, diverse and culturally appropriate foods.

Restrictions on the movement of foods and people in response to the COVID-19 pandemic will pose risks to producers and traders (such as through price fall, uncertainty on input and equipment access, loss of stock, closure of market outlets), as well as risks to consumers (through income fluctuations/losses, unemployment) that could jeopardize the availability, access and/or affordability of healthy and balanced diets. Projects should counteract these measures by guaranteeing the mobility of foods and people under safe conditions, especially to maintain the availability, access and affordability of fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, fish, and other animal products.

Projects should be assessed to ensure that a marketable price is established/maintained for foods that tend to be high in essential nutrients such as vitamins and minerals (micronutrients), proteins, and unrefined carbohydrates, such as dietary fiber without compromising the livelihood of the producers. On the other hand, dietary risks should be assessed for projects, including generalized food subsidies, which make foods that are high in calories and low in nutrients relatively more accessible, affordable and convenient in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While processing might be required to minimize the loss of highly perishable foods along the value chain, projects should ensure that the promoted techniques are not compromising the nutritional value of the natural food.

Projects should avoid making unsubstantiated claims on how foods and dietary supplements can prevent COVID-19 infection and restrain from promoting those canned or processed foods that may be high in

fats, added sugar, salt and preservatives. On the contrary, projects should ensure that consumers are educated about food safety and how to maintain healthy, balanced diets as an important part of supporting a strong immune system. Unhealthy diets are a primary cause of poor management of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and resulting adverse health outcomes. Evidence shows that individuals with underlying nutrition-related NCDs (diabetes, hypertension, heart disease) have a higher risk of severity of health impact and mortality from infectious disease, and early reports suggest that this is also true of exposure to COVID-19.

E. Child labour prevention and reduction and forced labour

Child labour is defined as work that is inappropriate for a child's age, affects children's education, or is likely to harm their health, safety or morals. FAO projects will avoid child labour and ensure that no children engage in project-related work that could negatively affect their health and personal development or interfere with their compulsory education. A minimum age for employment shall be specified in connection with the programming activities, as determined by national law and consistent with the ILO Convention No. 138.[8]

COVID-19 will lead to child labour as a negative coping mechanism where children are less controlled in times of movement restriction, and as such can more easily meet the critical labour shortage in agricultural value chains (UNICEF, 2020). The loss of income from families and vulnerable groups is likely to push these vulnerable groups to send their children to work to earn an income and meet food security needs. The closure of schools is an additional risk.

FAO projects will ensure that no forced labour is employed, which consists of any work or service not voluntarily performed[9] that is exacted from an individual under threat of force or penalty. This covers any kind of involuntary or compulsory labour, such as indentured labour, bonded labour, or similar labour-contracting arrangements. No trafficked persons shall be employed in connection with the programming activities.[10] Where cases of forced labour are identified, immediate steps shall be taken to correct and remedy them.

Deteriorating economic and social situation triggered by COVID-19 pandemics may trigger use of child and/or forced labour in agricultural and food sector (ILO, 2020). FAO projects operating in areas and settings having vulnerable communities that may resort to negative coping strategies should be monitored closely and when cases identified, mitigation measures introduced (for further information see section on non-discrimination and equal opportunity).

Below are some practical recommendations to help projects avoiding child labour:

- identify children at risk of child labour and link children and caregivers to food assistance and emergency livelihoods programmes;
- include caregivers of children in child labour in the targeting criteria of food assistance programmes and consider the economic impact on households that used to rely on child labour;

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[8] The Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), sets the general minimum age for admission to employment or work at 15 years.

[9] Work is on a voluntary basis when it's done with the free and informed consent of a worker. Such consent must exist throughout the employment relationship and the worker must have the possibility to revoke freely given consent. In particular, there can be no "voluntary offer" under threat or other circumstances of restriction or deceit. To assess the authenticity of a free and informed consent, it is necessary to ensure that no external constraint or indirect coercion has been carried out, either by an act of the authorities or by an employer's practice.

[10] See the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29), as well as the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention.

- ensure Food Security and Livelihood programmes use do-no-harm criteria for activities/employment opportunities, preventing the involvement of children in non-age appropriate tasks, supporting education of children of compulsory age or remote/home-based learning opportunities;

- monitor the impact of emergency agricultural support (such as farming, livestock, fishing kits distribution) and cash for work on child labour, and

- monitor rapidly changing markets and labour market situation and adapt economic strengthening programmes to the new conditions — for instance, promoting market opportunities created by the COVID-19 crisis such as selling PPE equipment, food etc. while continuing monitoring the child labour situation.

F.   Workers' and producers' organizations

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining is a core labour standard and FAO shall both promote it and denounce any violation of it. Promotion here refers to the active support of opportunities for rural workers to join groups, producers' associations or rural workers' organizations. In particular, producers' organizations, contract farming groups, out- growers' associations and other informal groups represent important vehicles to enable rural workers to form representative organizations. When supporting producers' and workers' organizations during COVID-19, FAO's projects should in particular look at increasing social protection and empowering rural youth and women to join such organizations or organize in specific groups.

G. Security

Projects should be vigilant concerning risks to workers and contractors arising from potential social unrest associated with COVID-19. Should social conditions deteriorate and project managers feel that their staff is at risk, they should discuss with their security providers the best way to assure worker safety while maintaining business continuity. The use of security personnel should always be guided by the principles of proportionality and good international practice to ensure appropriate conduct towards workers and affected communities.

ESS 8: Gender equality

A.   Combating discriminatory practices

Gender equality is central to FAO's mandate to achieve food security for all and raising levels of nutrition, improving agricultural productivity and natural resource management, and improving the lives of rural populations. FAO can achieve its goals only if it simultaneously works towards gender equality and supports women's diverse roles in agriculture and rural development. Gender equality is not only an essential means by which FAO can achieve its mandate, it is also a basic human right.

Past and recent health or economic crises have shown that rural women tend to be disproportionally affected in a number of ways, including but not limited to food security and nutrition, health, time burden and productive activities, as well gender-based violence. Further, their work burden increases due to school closures and the additional care needs of sick household members.

COVID-19 is impacting the lives of women, men, girls and boys differently. The impacts of COVID-19 also vary – in their nature and magnitude – by age, disability, sexual orientation, socio- economic status, color, civil status and race. Gender considerations matter in understanding and responding to the impacts of COVID-19, including health and economic factors as well as labour and gender-based violence:

- Women are more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 because they are the majority of health

care, often work in agriculture and represent the vast majority of unpaid caregivers. Men are vulnerable where gender norms mean they do not promptly access health services.

- The unequal access of rural women to resources and services, limited decision-making power, lower educational status and restricted mobility will affect their capacity to meet the nutritional needs of their families, access health services and earn an income. Coping strategies, such as reduction in the quantity and/or quality of food in a household, are frequently adopted by women, in favor of men and children.

- Restrictions on the movement of goods and people can also hamper women's trading activities, affecting trade both across borders and between communities.

- Rural women and girls have less opportunities to access support services and essential health care due to reduced availability of legal, social and policing structures. The difficulties in accessing health services, combined with increased burdens and separation from caregivers, may lead to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) against children, in particular girls, including child/forced marriage or transactional sex.

- Women and girls may have less access to clean water and soap than men and boys; be unable to adhere to physical distancing measures due to their domestic work, like collecting water and cleaning; and have reduced access to sanitary items for their menstrual hygiene.

- Women may be disproportionally impacted by job and income losses associated with COVID-19 deteriorating their economic situation. To cope with reduced and inadequate income, women and girls may resort to transactional sex to meet their, and their dependents', basic needs, including food.

- Women tend to have less access to information and technology (including mobile phones and the internet) meaning that they are disadvantaged, compared to men, in knowing what assistance is available and how their needs could be communicated during COVID-19 pandemics.

- Girls may be at the increased risk of dropping out of school as they take on additional unpaid care work or they take over from older female relatives who fall sick.

- Women and girls are at a greater risk of violence – domestic violence, harmful practices (like girl marriage), sexual exploitation, coercion, psychological abuse.

The United Nations is urging governments to put women and girls at the center of their recovery efforts. COVID-19 could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights. Measures to protect and stimulate the economy must target women. We must recognize unpaid care work as a vital contribution to the economy. FAO projects should consider "no-regret" and COVID-19 specific measures to address gender inequality issues during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, by enhancing the evidence base:

- disaggregate person-related data by the sex and age of the individual;

- enhance the use of gender assessments when making decisions and designing responses to COVID-19;

- provide information in ways that are accessible to and readily understood by the different women, men, girls and boys in the targeted populations;

- include women and men in all response teams and make sure that at least one member is gender competent;

- ensure that both women and men are leaders and decision-makers in COVID-19 responses, in all areas and at all levels;

- conduct gender-responsive monitoring to understand the which women, men, girls and boys are being supported by FAO projects;

- protect the safety and security of employees, partners and beneficiaries – being aware that circumstances and needs differ according to gender and age. This includes addressing GBV.

The United Nations has urged all governments to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19. There is increased demand on domestic violence helplines and emergency shelters around the world. Nearly one in five women worldwide has experienced violence in the past year. Many are now trapped at home with their abusers. Pandemics compound existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities, increasing risks of abuse. In times of crisis such as an outbreak, women and girls may be at higher risk, for example, of intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence due to heightened tensions in the household. They also face increased risks of other forms of gender-based violence including sexual exploitation and abuse in these situations. Recommendations for addressing GBV during the COVID-19 outbreak include the following:

- ensure policies and interventions around response speak to everyone's needs, which is a fundamental step to understanding the primary and secondary effects of a health emergency on different individuals and communities. At the same time, the protection needs of women and girls must be at the center of response efforts;

- ensure the response to COVID-19 does not reproduce or perpetuate harmful gender norms, discriminatory practices and inequalities. It is important to recognize that social, cultural and gender norms, roles, and relations influence women and men's vulnerability to infection, exposure, and treatment;

- consider how these may differ among groups of women and men, particularly those most excluded such as those living in poverty, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, internally displaced persons or refugees, LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals, and others who face intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination;

- consider how the quarantine experience can be different for women and men, such as whether women and men's different physical, cultural, security, and sanitary needs are being met. Recognize that the home may not be a safe place for some individuals and may indeed increase exposure to intimate partner violence;

- update gender-based violence referral pathways to reflect changes in available services;

- prioritize women's participation as their roles within communities typically place them in a good position to influence positively the design and implementation of prevention activities. Given their proximity to the local level, their surveillance and insights can help signal the start of an outbreak and improve the overall health situation;

- include women in decision making for outbreak preparedness and response and ensure women's representation at all levels of decision-making;

- support the meaningful engagement of women and girls at the community level, including their networks and organizations, to ensure efforts and response are not further discriminating and excluding those most at risk.

B.   Equal opportunities for men and women to participate in and benefit

The following specific groups could be affected disproportionally by the COVID-19 pandemics: women, young children, persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people:

- women and girls who need access to sexual and reproductive health services, and may be exposed to increasing GBV as a result of containment measures;

- older persons who have a high mortality-risk if infected;

- young children, especially those at risk of all forms of malnutrition;

- IDPs or refugees residing in densely populated settlements (camps or otherwise);

- people with disabilities who may not be able access public health messaging and services;

- populations who are moving due to ongoing armed conflict depending on the context where the virus spreads;

- people living with HIV, people with Tuberculosis (TB) and other chronically ill people;

- minority groups, indigenous peoples, geographically remote communities or those perceived to be associated with non-state armed actors whose access to existing life-saving assistance may be blocked on the premise of preventing contagion;

- migrant workers who have been pushed out but are stuck at borders due to border closure, and may be perceived as vectors of the virus and face anger / discrimination.

The following household categories identified as most vulnerable during the 2008/9 triple food, fuel and financial crisis, would potentially be among the hardest hit during COVID-19 pandemics:

- female-headed households and households with high dependency ratios;

- households mainly depending on income from the informal sector (e.g. daily labour, petty trade);

- households largely relying on support from others through the disruption of formal and informal safety nets;

- households with migrant workers largely depending on remittances;

- households depending on the mining sector and processing industry;

- households with people living with HIV or TB who were no longer able to afford medical services;

- urban households were generally hit harder than in rural areas – due to their heavier reliance on markets to access food.

FAO's projects are encouraged to scale-up gender-sensitive monitoring systems and assessments to provide the evidence base for changing levels of vulnerability and target immediate and long-term actions during and in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemics. A range of social protection measures, especially including those targeting most vulnerable populations should be given priority. Further details on mitigation measures to be adjusted to specific project circumstances are described in section ESS7: Decent Work.

ESS 9: Indigenous peoples and cultural heritage

ESS 9 recognizes that cultural heritage and indigenous peoples' traditions and knowledge present opportunities for many of the challenges that humankind will face in the coming decades. This is of particular significance in relation to indigenous food systems in the face of increasing food demand and traditional knowledge with respect to adapting to climate change vulnerabilities and impacts. The core principles of FAO's policy on indigenous peoples are: self-determination – respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices that contribute to sustainable and equitable development; and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

Cultural heritage is central to individual and collective identity and memory, providing continuity between past, present and future. Cultural heritage reflects and expresses people's constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge, traditions and practices. Cultural heritage and traditional resources are often unique and irreplaceable, and may be particularly fragile due to neglect, exploitation, or even destruction given their symbolism. For example, wild species continue to be an important source of food, income and

cultural identity for millions of indigenous and rural people, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions. Wild meat thus represents the main source of vital protein, fat and micronutrients – as well as a key element in diet and income diversification for millions of rural people in these regions. Dependence on wild meat increases with poverty, including in places and at times when other food supply chains fail, making wild meat the sole or primary source of protein and income available, for instance during economic hardship, civil unrest or drought.

Indigenous peoples' communities may face unique health, social and economic challenges during and in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemics. FAO projects working with and related to indigenous peoples' livelihoods and promoting indigenous food systems should consider the following mitigation measures (supplementary to mitigation measures described for other social safeguards on decent work, gender and others):

- encourage Governments to include indigenous peoples' representatives, leaders and traditional authorities in emergency and health response committees or any entity dedicated to the COVID-19 pandemic;

- ensure availability of disaggregated data on indigenous peoples, including on rates of infection, mortality, economic impacts, care burden, and incidence of violence, including gender-based violence;

- support dissemination of information and audiovisual materials related to public health safety during COVID-19 pandemics to indigenous peoples translated into local indigenous languages and shared with the traditional leaders and youth leaders;

- involve indigenous youth in the dissemination of COVID-19 messages within the communities, both in mainstream languages as well as in local indigenous languages because their command of social media makes them a fundamental player in this situation;

- support health authorities to include in their response an intercultural approach that takes into consideration traditional indigenous health care providers, training them in all the relevant health and safety measures and the use of equipment to stop the spread of the virus;

- encourage the inclusion of indigenous peoples´ communities among the recipients of health assistance and personal protection equipment and materials;

- respect the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent in the prevention, development, implementation and monitoring of measures to address COVID-19;

- the right of indigenous peoples to be or remain in voluntary isolation during and in the aftermath of COVID-19 must be respected. Furthermore, in situations where indigenous peoples' communities have self-imposed quarantine and have established controls to limit the access to their communities, such mechanisms should be respected and reinforced whenever feasible;

- enhance and support protection measures to stop external farmers, sellers, private firms, industries and miners from entering indigenous peoples´ territories taking advantage of the current crisis situation;

- improve the access and management of clean water and sanitation, particularly for indigenous peoples living in remote communities, to avoid further spread of the virus. This could include relevant indigenous practices such as watershed management;

- should social protection measures be envisaged for affected indigenous peoples, their details should be previously agreed upon with indigenous authorities to ensure their cultural appropriateness;

- support indigenous peoples in securing and exercising their territorial rights to sustainably manage the resources they depend on for food, income and cultural identity as many continue relying on wild meat for their food and nutritional security, and their livelihoods. Any measures

adopted should be mindful of this traditional source of food and income and promote sustainable and safe sourcing practices. Additionally, these measures should be strengthened by awareness raising related to public health and occupational risks during meat handling posed by the COVID-19 virus;

- facilitate effective cooperation with neighboring states where indigenous peoples live in cross-border areas, ensuring that the above practices are exercised by all actors in close cooperation with the affected indigenous peoples;

- discourage any planned or ongoing forced evictions of indigenous peoples, especially during the COVID-19 emergency and its immediate aftermath;

- refrain from entering indigenous peoples' communities and only do so with the authorization of indigenous peoples' representative institutions, following their clearly established protocols to reduce transmission risks. Entities that are engaged in cooperation with indigenous peoples should pursue alternative activities that do not involve physical contact. Where contact with indigenous peoples is unavoidable, ensure that staff are competent and informed on how to avoid the transmission of the virus, practice of physical distancing and monitor risk reduction strategies;

- revisit and reconsider ongoing projects, in close coordination with the indigenous peoples involved, taking into consideration the effects of COVID-19 (and related mitigation efforts) on these communities;

- consider establishing post COVID-19 reconstruction activities and programs that are specifically aimed at indigenous peoples and that support indigenous peoples' traditional livelihoods, their economies and their communities.

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