



Confronting COVID-19

The novel coronavirus has disrupted nearly every facet of life around the globe. Economies are depressed, supply chains are interrupted, and lives are upended by lockdowns, travel bans and general uncertainty.

For the world's poorest and most marginalized, the situation is growing more dire by the day. A preliminary assessment by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic may add between 83 and 132 million people to the total number of undernourished in the world in 2020.

We have seen significant impacts to our goal of supporting smallholder farmers reach a living income. Program activities have been heavily affected in all 21 countries in which we work. Bangladesh and India are among countries already reporting low availability of essential food products. Fears are growing that this will become more widespread as the pandemic continues. What's more, the nutritional status of the most vulnerable population groups is likely to deteriorate further due to the health and socio-economic impacts of the virus.

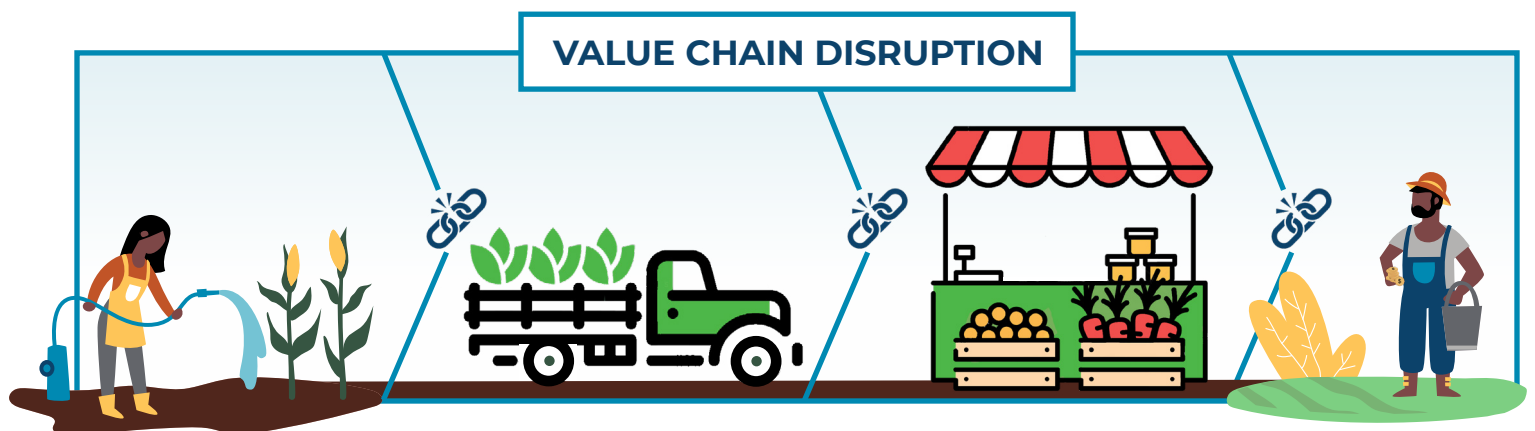
Despite setbacks, we are helping ensure participants in our programs have the resources to adapt and innovate in the face of the pandemic so they can provide for their families, continue the essential work of providing food for communities and build lasting food systems to address the new normal.



COVID-19'S IMPACT ON SMALLHOLDER FARMERS

With farming activities around the world significantly impacted by the pandemic, farmers are facing several major challenges, including:

1. REDUCED MARKET ACCESS – in most countries, farmers have been able to access their land and feed their animals despite lockdowns. However, restrictions on movement have severely hampered harvesting and planting seasons, as well as access to local markets. In India, despite many urban workers returning to rural areas, restrictions on movement mean there is a labor shortage with fields left unplanted and crops left to rot. Restrictions on movement in many countries have also made it very difficult for farmers to get their products to markets, especially when they are reliant on middlemen or transporters to move their products.



2. FALLING DEMAND – most countries have put restrictions in place on wet and dry markets, meaning that even if farmers can move their products, finding consumers to buy them is a challenge. Many markets have shorter opening hours, limits on customer and/or vendor numbers, or have been ordered to close. Hotels and restaurants have been forced to close, or significantly reduce activity. As a result, many farmers are left with products they cannot sell, while in other places the cost of food has increased significantly. Across the countries we work in, cooperatives are mobilizing to donate milk, honey, and other products to people in need within their communities and stop products from going to waste. Household consumption of milk has increased, with many farmers unable to transfer it to the collection hubs and/or put off by the decrease in price offered by the big dairies. In Tanzania, buyers from neighboring countries are unable to cross the border, resulting in reduced sales and a decrease in farmer incomes.

3. INCREASED COST AND REDUCED AVAILABILITY OF INPUTS – restrictions on movement have resulted in increased costs for farmers. In many countries, farmers have seen feed costs in particular increase significantly, squeezing their already tight margins. In other countries, animal vaccinations and quality trainings have not been possible, increasing fears of sickness among livestock and that products will not meet quality standards set by actors further up the value chain.

4. BREAKING OR BROKEN SUPPLY CHAINS – this has been seen in the United States, where forced closures of large-scale meat processing plants have led to threats of a meat shortage, but is also evident in Uganda, where reports are showing decreased availability of food in urban areas.

5. THREAT OF A ‘HUNGER PANDEMIC’ – farm activities in countries have been put on hold, with a lack of availability of seeds, other essential inputs, and on-farm labor, resulting in a fewer crops planted. The World Food Programme has warned the COVID-19 crisis will be followed by a ‘hunger pandemic.’

All these challenges will significantly affect our goal of supporting the farmers we work with to close the living income gap. In fact, data is showing household income has declined significantly, causing the living income gap to grow.

In the initial response stage that began in March 2020, our teams mobilized their networks to spread awareness about the disease among project communities, including how the disease spreads and measures people can take to minimize their exposure. We scaled back interactions with communities, instead connecting with families via cellphone, WhatsApp and other platforms, and sharing messaging via community radio and posters.

Throughout the crisis, we've ensured farmers have access to personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies so they can safely continue producing and selling food.



- In **Mexico**, project technicians continue to support poultry farmers apply strict bio-security controls

- In **Rwanda**, the team was able to assist community animal health workers restock key medicines and vaccines



- Teams in **Ghana** and **Uganda** are supporting farmers to procure animal feed and other inputs, and farmers in our projects have been equipped with masks, hand sanitizer, and other safety equipment

Before COVID-19 gripped our projects, we were already beginning to bridge gaps in our food and farming systems. As the months progressed, COVID-19 has made these efforts more urgent. So, our teams began to innovate.



- In **Nepal**, for example, Heifer supported the acquisition of travel passes during a strict lockdown so that farmers could sell and deliver food using an “agri-ambulance”

- In **Ecuador**, the food system is changing after project participants created a service that delivers fresh produce directly from farmers to urban customers and emphasizes affordability for low income families



- In the **United States**, Heifer USA supports both small-scale farmers and their processing facilities, which are especially important to keeping local food systems functioning during the pandemic

The e-commerce and direct-to-consumer approaches in Heifer USA and Ecuador clearly show the importance of investments in farmer-focused infrastructure for closing the living income gap.



Self-Help Groups in our projects have savings to rent vehicles to transport products closer to consumers. Quarantine measures disrupted previous links, but we are innovating ways to bridge the supply gaps.

OUR RESPONSE ACROSS THE GLOBE*

ECUADOR

While much of the country remains under lockdown, farming and food production are still among the few operational industries, creating opportunities for small-scale farmers to provide safe, healthy products and access new markets for their goods.

\$60,000

Provide families and food workers with

additional safety equipment: We will equip an additional 700 farming families and distributors with bio-security kits containing suits, goggles, masks, disinfectants, etc., to stop further spread of the virus among food producers and deliver products safely to consumers.

\$30,000

Strengthen micro-enterprises and increase food product diversity:

This will enable food producers participating in our network of rural entrepreneurs to purchase raw materials, such as crab, fish and fruit pulp, and package them into products to support the direct-to-consumer model.

UNITED STATES

Heifer USA supports small-scale farmers to deliver fresh, nutritious food to reliable markets by providing them with online training, education and resources needed to sell their products for a fair price. This work is critical to helping small-scale American farmers lift themselves out of poverty.

\$30,000

Connecting families to nutrition:

Market access empowers farmers to earn a living income from their farms. The Grass Roots Farmers' Cooperative (of which Heifer USA is 1 of 22 member farms) is steadily increasing its customer base, attracting more farmers and requiring increased production to meet growing demand, especially during restrictions caused by COVID-19. By setting up infrastructure such as feeders and fencing, as well as connection and partnership with financial institutions, farmers sell meat directly to consumers, garnering the highest possible value.

ZAMBIA

As the country continues to struggle with rising cases, farmers are looking for ways to communicate health updates.

\$25,000

Bridging communication gaps:

Community Facilitators in Zambia are repurposing solar radios and mobile phones distributed through our projects to access daily updates by the Ministry of Health and share COVID-19 information among participants in self-help groups.

INDIA

Many local governments continue to enforce lockdowns and curfews. The poultry sector has been heavily hit. Farmers have either lost their flocks or been forced to sell their products at a loss.

\$45,000

Provide emergency veterinary vaccination and care:

COVID-19 has disrupted supply chains – prompting a large need for vaccines, feed, and other livestock supplies.



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