

***Covid-19, Family Farming and the United Nations
Decade of Family Farming (UNDF): Improving
policy dialogue and supporting family farmers***



This synthesis report summarized the result of the process conducted by the World Rural Forum (WRF) with the support of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to map the policy engagement and dialogue experiences of UNFFF National Committees for Family Farming (NCFs) during the COVID-19 crisis, from March to November 2020. It analysed the NCFs policy objectives related to the pandemic, the modalities of their engagement, and the main activities carried out to achieve their goals. The process included interviews with representatives of the 41 NCFs from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America & the Caribbean during October – November 2020.

1. The impacts of Covid-19 on Family Farming

In 2020, the pandemic of Covid-19 spread out to every single country and territory and family farmers— including peasants, fisher folk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, traditional communities, mountain farmers, forest users, women and youth- and their livelihood were seriously exposed to the healthy, economic and social impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 crisis is impacting in a much deeper way on family farmers, who are, at the same time, and in most cases, among the most vulnerable population. The specific challenges they need to address in the context of Covid-19 are related to: i) the disruption of their cycle of production through difficulty of access to inputs for production, higher prices, etc.; ii) difficulties in accessing to public and private markets due to temporary movement restrictions, closure of agricultural markets, or public procurement programs in schools, hospitals, etc.; iii) problems related to conservation of products due to lack of storage and refrigeration systems; iv) an important decrease in the income receiving from other formal or informal jobs.

Women, in particular, have seen growing restrictions on their mobility and access to productive resources alongside dramatic increases in gender-based violence. These have had direct impacts on household food and nutrition security. Meanwhile, rural youth – already facing some of the highest unemployment rates in the world - now have even less access to decent employment and education, including online education. This puts rural youth at risk of suffering poverty over the longer term.

Adding to that and during the same time, the effects of climate change have been felt, with a severe locust plague in Kenya, and hurricanes, heavy flooding in Central America, for instance. Other diseases were already threatening daily life in some countries, such as DRC, which was struggling with major Ebola, measles and cholera outbreaks. National Committees of Family Farming (NCFs) had to adapt their activities to the political context and possible new national political actors; 2020 was an election year for many countries, such as Burkina Faso, Bolivia, or Côte d'Ivoire.

But, on the other hand, family farmers and their organizations have been in the frontline since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, ensuring consumers' access to quality and healthy food, demonstrating their huge potential to ensure inclusive, equitable, and sustainable food

systems and the basis of livelihood development. In this sense, we can affirm that the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for countries to count on local food systems that are resistant to global and local shocks and has highlighted the fragility of many agricultural systems, previously threatened by food insecurity, or highly dependent on imports and foreign workforce. The economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis also stresses the urgency for rural communities, small towns, and cities to re-shape the rural economy and generate employment opportunities.

2. The United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 and the work of NCF in the context of Covid-19

On December 2017, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 72/239 that declared 2019 – 2028 as the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDF), recognizing the enormous contribution of Family Farming to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the role that family farms play in improving nutrition and ensuring global food security, eradicating poverty, ending hunger, conserving biodiversity, achieving environmental sustainability and helping to address migration. However, despite its enormous contribution to food security, small-scale family farming faces enormous constraints related to access to and control over productive assets and natural resources, credit, insurance, public and private markets access, cope with climate change, inequalities in food systems and poor participation in inclusive value chains etc. This undermines its profitability and economic situation and prevents family farming from developing its role in the food systems and in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Vision Statement of the UN Decade of Family Farming, including in its Global Action Plan is related to: “A world where diverse, healthy and sustainable food and agriculture systems flourish, where resilient rural and urban communities enjoy a high quality of life in dignity, equity, free from hunger and poverty. And family farming is essential to achieve this vision”.

The UNDF is a multistakeholder ongoing process to empower family farming sector towards the achievement of this vision and the National Committees of family farming develops a central role to implement the Decade at national level.

The NCFs are multistakeholders policy dialogue platforms on Family Farming started before 2014, in the framework of the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF 2014) and focused in promoting the development of public policies in favour of Family Farming. Nowadays there are 45 NCFs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean that gather more than 1,570 Farmers’ organizations (FOs), NGOs, public institutions, research centres, cooperation agencies, etc. At least 925 of the members are farmers’ organizations.

During the last years, the NCF have demonstrated to be a key space of commitment towards the improvement of legal and institutional frameworks related to agriculture. These are spaces where government and FOs can effectively interact and reach agreements. The Committees provide broad platforms to the different stakeholders in the country to interact, analyse and

discuss the current state of the agricultural and food sectors and propose and agree on strategies to improve it. In many cases, the NCFs contribute to strengthen the role of civil society, especially of farmers' organizations, in the decision making process, improving the ability to organize, articulate and create relationships between a wide range of stakeholders.

3. The NCF during the Covid-19 pandemic

3.1. The NCF Policy engagement in the Covid-19 crisis

A majority of NCFs played rather a strategic role at the national level, relying on their members' knowledge to address the family farmers' challenges and develop joint proposals to the national authorities. The proximity to rural communities facilitated the NCFs work, as local members have access to the most vulnerable and isolated population. They have a capacity for advocacy, discuss and make consensus with local, national authorities, and regional and international actors.

At the beginning of the 2020 crisis (march-June) NCFs saw a slowdown of their activities. Their capacity to work towards building consensus among family farmers, government, development partners, private sector and the general public, was seriously curtailed. Indeed, fear and lockdown paralysed the activities related to face-to-face exchanges, events and meetings.

Moreover, NCFs took time to adapt how they deal with the new situation, reorienting their work to online activities and ensuring that their members have had access to internet or phone and to find solution for working in the field.

After this short period the NCFs retaken and adapted the processes to the new context affected by the Covid-19. New mechanisms for policy dialogue, such as online events and meetings were designed.

During the Covid-19 crisis the Committees and their farmers' organizations were playing a strategic role at the national level to gather local information, report and share it with the local authorities, national government and its ministries+: state of the agricultural season, problems related to the shortages of seeds, inputs, difficulties in access to market, to transportation, to information, etc.

The NCF devoted their efforts to different activities: i) collecting information and share knowledge among their members, ii) taking part of Coordination Committees to discuss the impact of crisis in agriculture, iii) coordinating multistakeholder consultations and iv) proposing strategies for the design, execution, and monitoring of the measures to address the impact of Covid-19

crisis

Asia and the Pacific region

- **Nepal:** The NCFE held regular meetings with the focal points of the national government, highlighting the issues faced by the FFs in the Covid-19 context. The national government allocated resources to the NCFE, and committed to subsidise up to 70% of the construction of warehouses, to help with the production and storage efforts. The Committee also worked with the government on a minimum price subsidy for food products. The NCFE led the campaign *No lockdown in agriculture*. The NCFE advocated and coordinated with provincial governments, through online meetings, phone calls.
- **The Philippines:** During the pandemic an INCITEGov Ad Hoc Technical Working Group on Covid-19 was set up, from 22nd May to 24th June 2020. Members of ARDKPP (NCFE), among them PAKISAMA, participated in the INCITEGov Ad Hoc Committee on COVID-19 Subgroup on Food and Nutrition Security.

Latin America and The Caribbean

- **Bolivia:** In March 2020, the CIOEC (NCFE), in coordination with the Ministry of Rural Development and Land, Ministry of Health through the Vice-Ministry of Traditional and Intercultural Medicine, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Government, the Universidad Mayor of San Andrés, with the support of international cooperation (FAO, IICA) and FFs, issued a Plan of strategic response actions to guarantee the family farming fresh food supply chain. It contained a diagnosis of the needs of the FF sector in the scope of the pandemic, along with a global strategic response, including objectives, actions, and resources required to achieve it.
- **Dominican Republic:** The NCFE collaborated in the creation of multi-sectoral monitoring committees with the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Education, the municipalities, and CSOs.

West and Central Africa

- **Burkina Faso:** The NCFE is a member of the Covid-19 Action and monitoring committee of non-state actors and participated then in the operationalization of the emergency measures taken by the Ministry of Agriculture.
- **Côte d'Ivoire:** From April to May 2020, the PANAFCI (NCFE) collected information on the impact of the pandemic from the regional committees, from the ground. PANAFCI asked its regional platforms to meet the local authorities with their requests in order to reach the national level. Family farming and civil society organisations within PANAFCI have committed to support the government's efforts through the implementation of actions such as: relaying information on government initiatives for the benefit of FFs and the farming community in general; distributing cash and basic foodstuffs to FFs; monitoring the implementation of the response measures to Covid-19 in collaboration with the ministries in charge of the agricultural sector.
- **DRC:** On 25th March, COPACO, the leading organisation of the NCFE, and a member of the Regional Platform of Farmers' Organisations of Central Africa (PROPAC), sent a letter to the government with specific demands to review its budget in favour of family farmers, to face the crisis. A task force was created by the government, in which FOs members of the NCFE have been integrated for the implementation and evaluation of the Covid-19.
- **Mali:** The NCFE members are part of the National Consultation Committee on Covid-19. Actions were focused on protection and hygiene products distribution to the population. Some members participated in the decision-making process, and were consulted by the government. Virtual and face-to-face meetings were held. The dialogue was mainly operated with the Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Scientific investigation. The NCFE received material support from the government, in concrete protective equipment for FFs

3.2. The mobilization of the NCCF towards the UNDF National Action Plans

The process to define contextualized frameworks to implement the Decade at national level started before the pandemic. The WRF has identified processes to build National Action Plans of the UNDF (NAP) in 41 countries with 7 NAP already approved.

The main observed effects of the Covid-19 crisis on the implementation of the UNDF at national level can be summarised as follows.

During the first 4 months, outreach and mobilization processes towards the implementation of the UNDF have slowed down. The development of NAP slowed down, due to operational constraints - lockdowns and social distancing - and a shift in the priorities of governments, FOs, NCCFs, FAO, IFAD to address the urgent and emergency response.

During the last months of 2020 the NCCFs reinforced their work, especially towards the definition of National Plans for strengthening family farming.





Asia and the Pacific region

- **AFA:** the National Scoping Forums on the UNDFP planned by AFA for the second semester of the year 2020 in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, and the Philippines were adapted to the sanitary conditions, while conducted regional seminar to draft Regional Action Plan of the UNDFP in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) together with the International Cooperative Alliance Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP).
- **Indonesia:** the NCFP is engaging in the NAP using discussion and consultation with the focal point of the UNDFP implementation, who is the government through the Food Security Agency under the Ministry of Agriculture.
- **Japan:** on the 25th of July 2020, the NCFP organized online its General Assembly and workshop for National Action Plan. In the last week of the same month, the NCFP gave an online lecture on the UNDFP to Congressmen.
- **Nepal:** the NCFP sought to link its position to the National Action Plan on family farming, already approved in 2019 by the government, to eventually include post-Covid-19 measures. As both the Government of Nepal and the NCFP are committed to the UNDFP, they could rely on their ongoing work on the NAP to articulate their cooperation on Covid-19 issues.
- **The Philippines:** in September 2020, a virtual conference was organized to work NAP. The NCFP aimed to have an inclusive, responsive, and realistic plan, incorporating post-Covid responses. IFAD also collaborated closely with ARDKPP by providing technical support on the elaboration of the national action plan of the UNDFP.

East and Southern Africa

- **Madagascar:** from October 2020, the NCFP has taken over the elaboration of the NAP focusing on the UNDFP Global Action Plan Pillar 5 “Improving the socio-economic inclusion, resilience and well-being of family farmers, women farmers, rural households and rural communities. Need to strengthen the capacities of family farmers”, integrating the issues of professionalization and economic inclusion for post-Covid recovery. The NCFP is working on it with CIRAD.

Latin America and The Caribbean

- **Costa Rica:** the UNDFP National Action Plan on Family Farming was about to be approved and launched when the Covid-19 pandemic was declared. The government and the REDCAF (NCFP) defined a common strategy to address this situation. They identified that the process of approval of the NAP should continue, considering it as a meaningful instrument to face the challenges of the Covid-19 crisis. They identified those measures/ programs included in the NAP which should be prioritized to contribute to the Covid-19 emergency response and recovery. The launching event (26 October 2020) has also been adapted to an online format, with the presence of the highest authorities and international organizations.
- **Dominican Republic:** in November 2020, the ANC (NCFP) met the Vice-Ministry of Rural Development to request a meeting of the NCFP and work on the operationalization of the Action Plan of Family Farming that can bring solutions to the COVID crisis in the rural areas and address the impacts of climate change.

- **El Salvador:** In the context of a pre-electoral period, the NCFE presented the document of the Family Farming Law in the Legislative Assembly with the support of four parliamentarians. The Law was approved by the Legislative Assembly (13 January 2021).

West and Central Africa

- **Burkina Faso:** the NCFE organized a national workshop on October 26-27, 2020, gathering the government, FAO, and FIDA, to start the process of a NAP roadmap.
- **DRC:** last August 2020, a 2-day national workshop was organized by the NCFE, with the participation of 34 people, from FOs, government bodies, and donors. Assessment analysis of the pandemic on FFs and the legal context of DRC regarding the Covid-19 and the UNDFE were conducted. The final results have been integrated in the UNDFE roadmap proposal.
- **Senegal:** an online Multistakeholder Conference (23 June 2020) promoted by the NCFE, gathering more than 50 participants of farmers and other civil society organizations, sectorial ministries, FAO, IFAD, EU, CEDEAO, CILSS, etc., was held, in order to articulate actions on the Covid-19 response and define a roadmap in line with the process of elaboration of a UNDFE NAP in the country.



3.3. Lessons learned from the policy engagement of NCFs

The mapping of policy engagement and dialogue experiences of the NCFs during the Covid-19 crisis highlighted some important learned lessons.

- The members of the NCFs have been in the front-line on the work at the ground level, relaying information on the situation and raising awareness on the measures taken by the national and local authorities to combat Covid-19 and the hygienic and sanitary measures. This activity was specially developed when the NCF has developed a process of decentralization.
- Family farming organizations and NCFs have gained visibility and recognition, providing access to food to their families and their communities.
- Generally, the pandemic has highlighted the organisation and resilience of the NCFs and their members. Despite restrictions on movement, closed markets, and worsening socio-economic and health conditions, they have been able to carry out their work. The active participation of NCFs in the definition of the different measures to deal with the impacts of Covid-19 was facilitated in the cases where the Committees were already recognized by the government, international and cooperation agencies.
- There is an increasing interest in settling these platforms of dialogue. Out of the 45 NCFs, seven new were set up in 2020, during this crisis as a necessity to bring together the actors of family farming and think strategically to advocate for family farming.
- NCFs have a huge potential to make a link between the different levels and share different expertise among these levels. The decentralization of NCFs creating subnational committees in the regions of the country also strengthens their advocacy and capacity for action with local and national authorities.
- The NCF dialogued with the governments, proposing different short-term solutions, and, moreover, proposals to build resilience and sustainability in food systems. More a Committee is recognized institutionally at the national and international levels, more it is able to participate in the policy dialogue with the government and its different ministries to advocate and to propose actions to strengthen family farming.
- The link between the NCF and regional family farmers organizations has also facilitated their advocacy work and information sharing.
- There is a significant added value in the collaboration between NCF, national government, and international institutions, in order to clearly identify different impacts in rural areas, possible gaps in policy measures and to disseminate the measures within the communities in different country regions.
- The NCFs could play a key role in supporting family farmers, but furthermore, it has a protagonist role in building national consensus and reflection on resilient, sustainable, inclusive and viable food systems needed in each country.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The review of NCCF experiences in policy dialogue came up with a series of recommendations towards an increasing engagement of the NCCFs in political processes, including the agenda for sustainable food systems:

- The continuous dialogue between NCCFs and the government should be encouraged, while the direct participation of them in decision making processes should be reinforced. The NCCFs can mobilize farmers at the regional and local levels and could be key actors in policy dialogue not only with central governments but also with regional and local authorities. In this sense, the recognition of the Committees by national and international actors should be enhanced. Not in vain when the NCCFs were consolidated, recognized and institutional supported, their advocacy and awareness-raising work was reinforced, while they provided specific support to the local communities.
- The Decade framework and the NAP are considered powerful tools to respond to actual challenges and future crises. Although there is a continuous need to include the UNDF agenda in the framework of the Covid-19 response, there is a raising awareness on the need to strategically re-think and transform food systems to be more inclusive, resilient, viable and sustainable. And the family farming should be at the centre of these systems. The NAPs are considered important instruments to minimize the impacts of Covid-19 on livelihoods and food security, to address the recovery phase and to be better prepared for future crises.
- The NCCFs need to keep mobilizing their members, international and cooperation agencies, governments, research institutions, etc. on the implementation of the national contextualized UNDF agenda (named National Action Plans of the UNDF).
- The capacity of mobilizing key stakeholders (FOs, other CSO, Government, FAO, and IFAD) to strengthen Family Farming, the UNDF, and the development of NAP in the national policy agendas is crucial; through advocacy actions, meetings with stakeholders, organization of policy dialogue forums, dissemination of the UNDF Global Action Plan should be reinforced. The NCCF identifies three types of support in order to achieve long-term commitments towards family farming and sustainable food systems: institutional, technical and financial. There is a need to review the policy framework to support family farming, to coordinate strategies, and align with national and regional Covid-19 responses and existing national strategies.
- Raising the profile of family farming in the shift of food systems is needed. A shift towards a holistic approach to strengthening family farming today to build resilient, sustainable, inclusive, and viable food systems of the future, that could address the future crises, has been highlighted.

As a final conclusion we should underline that during this Covid-19 crisis, the NCFs are emphasizing the importance of connecting short term measures with a strategic vision on how to enhance the resilience of local food systems based on family farming. In the medium and long term recovery process, the focus needs to be on maintaining and strengthening family farming towards ensuring sustained resilient food security and poverty reduction.

The enormous potential of NCFs in the political dialogues processes should be unleashed. It is very relevant to recognize and make more visible the potential of solid, inclusive NCFs to actively participate in political dialogue, to propose, discuss and agree on public policies frameworks, laws and regulations that are needed to strengthen family farming and address food systems inequalities.