



PAKISTAN

RAPID ASSESSTMENT

Development and Expansion
of Digital Agricultural Advisory
Services for Smallholder Farmers
in the Context of COVID

IFAD'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

RURAL POOR STIMULUS FACILITY (RPSF)

FACILITY'S PILLARS



Inputs
& basic assets



Targeted
funds



Access
to markets



Digital
services

RPSF project: Development and Expansion of Digital Agricultural Advisory Services for Smallholder Farmers in the Context of COVID (Pakistan)¹

Launched in April 2020, the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility is IFAD's multi-donor response to COVID-19. With the overall objective of providing agile support to poor rural producers affected by key immediate challenges posed due to COVID-19, it seeks to improve the resilience of rural livelihoods in the context of the crisis by ensuring timely access to inputs, information, markets and liquidity. The Development and Expansion of Digital Agricultural Advisory Services for Smallholder Farmers in the Context of COVID-19 in Pakistan is part of the 20% of the projects of the Facility chosen to undergo a rapid assessment to report against Tier 1 "Development Results" indicators in the RPSF Results Measurement Framework.

Project activities

This is a multi-country project covering Kenya, Nigeria and Pakistan, implemented through Precision Development, a US-based NGO. Through RPSF financing for US\$3.2 million, the project supported the delivery of personalized agricultural advice to farmers through their mobile phones, establishing a two-way information channel by which farmers can receive low-cost, customized advice to improve on-farm practices, input utilization, pest and disease management, environmental sustainability, and access to markets.

The project provided SMS and voice-based digital agricultural advisory services to roughly 1.3 million smallholder farmers in Pakistan. In order to be able to reach female livestock beneficiaries, PxD engaged with the Rural Community Development Society (RCDS), one of IFAD's partner organizations. As a result, of this engagement, a pilot was developed to provide information on vaccination, artificial insemination, disease identification, and best hygiene practices for at first 3,000 female livestock farmers, and digital advisory expanded to more than 50,000. Also, during this period, Pakistan was riddled with a viral infection called lumpy skin disease. To mitigate the losses for rural livestock holders, PxD initiated a robust advisory campaign that informed beneficiaries about the disease, its identification and management. Finally, during the floods of September 2022, messages have been tailored to support rural farmer to cope, protect their livestock and in some cases harvest earlier to minimize losses.

Rapid assessment methodology

Self-reported information on Tier I "Development Results" indicators was collected from a representative sample of 582 beneficiary households, of which 39 percent are headed by women and 19 percent are headed by youth (aged less than 35 years). Details of each indicator were asked with the aim of capturing the potential contribution effect from i) COVID-19 and ii) the RPSF project. Interviews were conducted between the first week of

¹ This note is prepared by Vibhuti Mendiratta, Gonzalo Nunez-Chaim and Piero Massotti from the Research and Impact Assessment (RIA) division of IFAD.

November 2021 and the first week of December 2021 using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) survey.

Key results ²

Contribution effect of COVID-19

- Around two thirds of households experienced a sharp decline in production, market sales and income due to COVID-19, prior to the start of project activities. Households were less often affected on the number of meals consumed, assets owned and their resilience to other shocks.
- Women headed beneficiary households were equally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to households headed by men. Contrary to this, youth headed beneficiary households were less affected compared to households headed by adults in terms of production and resilience.

Contribution effect of RPSF

- A large share of households was able to maintain or improve on indicators of interest. The strongest benefits were observed on production, food security (number of meals), resilience and number of assets, in line with the objective of the project. Total income also showed improvements after the project was implemented, but fewer households reported improvements on this indicator.
- At the same time, a lower share of beneficiary households headed by women, compared to those headed by men, reported having maintained or improved production and market sales after the program was introduced. This suggests it is harder for women-headed households to recover even with project support, although it could also imply that additional interventions may be required for these households to obtain the same results as other beneficiaries. Moreover, a larger share of beneficiary households headed by youth, compared to adults, reported having maintained or improved total income and resilience.

Lessons learned

- Based on the findings, in the future, such advisory service support should consider i) the overall income generation structure to achieve increases not only on production but also on sales and total income; and ii) additional support to increase adoption of advice, and to overcome the specific barriers faced by women-headed households.

² The rapid assessment does not consider a control group; thus, results are only indicative of potential contribution effects.

Figure 1: Percentage of households that experienced a loss in each Tier I indicator due to COVID

Figure 2: Percentage of households that were able to maintain or improve each Tier I indicator after RPSF

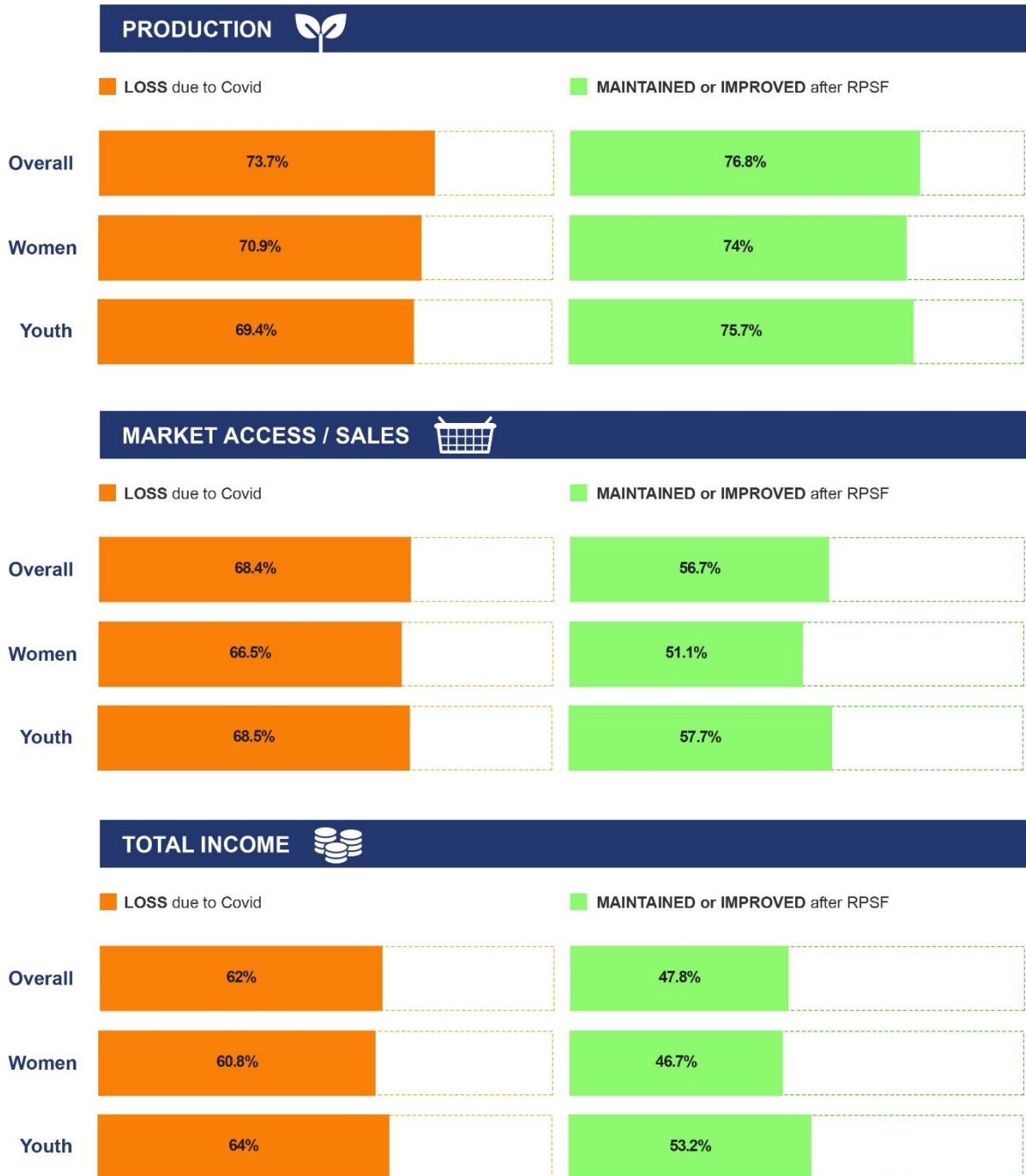
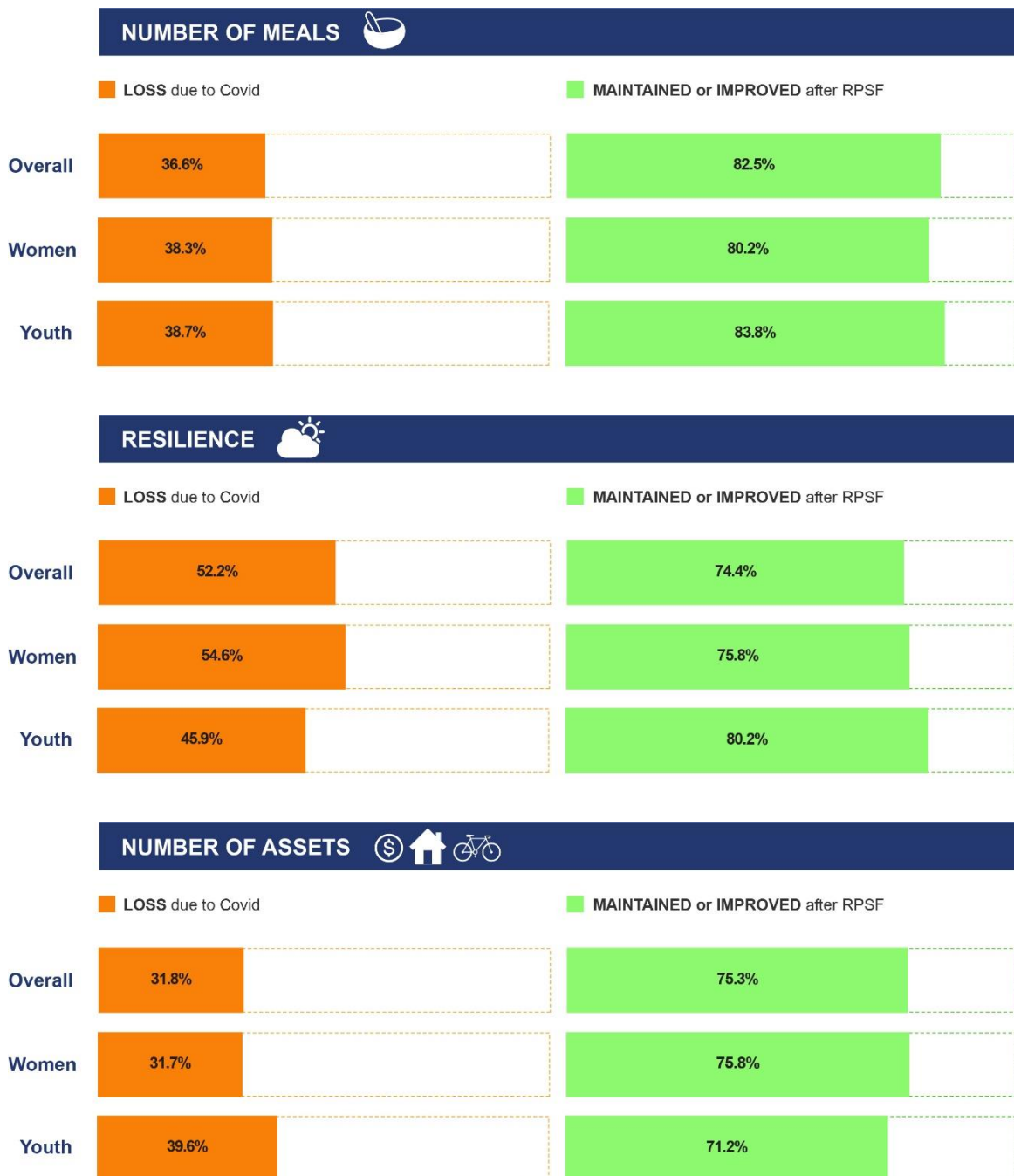


Figure 1: Percentage of households that experienced a loss in each Tier I indicator due to COVID

Figure 2: Percentage of households that were able to maintain or improve each Tier I indicator after RPSF



NOTE: RPSF activities were rolled out starting in March 2021.

Two separate questions were asked for each indicator. The first question asked what happened to each Tier 1 indicator between March 2020 - September 2020 relative to March 2019 - September 2019: i) a total loss; ii) reduced; iii) stayed the same; or iv) increased. The **orange bar** shows the percentage of households that responded i) or ii) to this question, that is, those which experienced a total loss or reduction in the indicator. The second question asked what happened to each Tier 1 indicator between March 2021 - September 2021 relative to March 2020 - September 2020, except for assets which considers the period between September 2020 and September 2021: i) reduced further; ii) stayed the same; iii) returned to level before COVID-19; or iv) increased above the level before COVID-19. The **green bar** shows the percentage of households that responded ii), iii) or iv) to this question, that is, those which maintained or improved each indicator relative to pre-RPSF levels.

Acknowledgements: IFAD's Programme Management Department (PMD) and Precision Development (PxD).



Investing in rural people

International Fund for Agricultural Development

Via Paolo di Dono, 44 – 00142 Rome, Italy

Tel: +39 06 54591 – Fax: +39 06 5043463

Email: ifad@ifad.org

www.ifad.org