

1. Learning summary – Latin America and the Caribbean

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IFAD response in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the region in a period of economic recession, and is swiftly escalating from a health to an economic and social crisis. The political landscape and government responses are quite heterogeneous, and IFAD has had to maneuver its messages and support accordingly. Although the virus is spreading rapidly, countries in the region have had the opportunity to learn from earlier responses in China and Europe.

IFAD put together a set of key actions, as follows:

- (i) Repurposing and accelerating some project activities to support early recovery and rapid reactivation after the immediate COVID-19 crisis.
- (ii) Increased data production and analysis feeding into policy dialogue, UN Country Team coordination and IFAD's programme of work.
- (iii) Introduction of COVID-19 protocols in IFAD projects to protect vulnerable groups, for example indigenous peoples.
- (iv) Adaptation of non-lending activities, for example reshaping of grants.
- (v) Set up of innovative spaces and tools, for example a hackathon, to encourage new ideas and scalable solutions.

More systematic linking of IFAD projects with government social protection programmes. The latter, including cash transfers, are widespread in the region, and IFAD's LAC division has generated a considerable amount of knowledge (through the UNIANDES grant¹) on how to operationalize synergies between social protection programmes and IFAD operations.

The LAC division has put in place a task force, with participation of colleagues from other departments, and a set of routines to facilitate intra- and inter-divisional coordination, as well as internal and external communication. The work of the taskforce has been fundamental for: branding the LAC response around the 3Rs (Recovery, Reactivation, Resilience); coordinating requests to increase efficiency and avoid overlapping work; and building an archive of COVID-19 data and responses in the region.

Lessons emerging from LAC's initial divisional response include:

- I. IFAD should continue to strengthen the resilience of poor rural communities. This is the best and most sustainable way to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to face any other shock in the future. Although it is important to be agile in response to the needs of our clients during a crisis, we should not rush. We should be mindful to avoid 'white elephants'. For example, digital tools are encouraged

but are not a 'silver bullet', especially in areas where internet access is poor or non-existent. In addition, by moving too quickly we may disregard reasonable exit strategies or fall into mission creep.

- II. Succinct, clear and active communication (for example using the 3Rs) is needed to avoid overlapping efforts, to manage expectations within and outside IFAD, and to strengthen IFAD's visibility.
- III. Particularly in UMICs, IFAD could frame its response also in terms of how we are leveraging our knowledge and expertise working on the front line, for example with farmer organizations, to provide sound intelligence feeding into policy making that is conducive to improved resilience of vulnerable populations.

Related knowledge resources, LAC

1. IFAD measures introduced in response to COVID-19 in Latin America follow the 3R approach (Recovery, Reactivation and Resilience), meaning that they are designed to ensure business continuity, promote inclusiveness, and build resilience. Polastri, R., 2020. [Recovery, reactivation, and resilience: Confronting COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). Rome, IFAD.
2. Community-driven development (CDD) programmes, which put people at the centre of designing their own solutions, are a critical part of the World Bank's response to the global COVID-19 crisis. To tackle a crisis of this magnitude and scale, countries need an equitable, whole-of-society approach, which lies at the heart of CDD programs. World Bank Group, 2020. [Community Responses to COVID-19: From the Horn of Africa to the Solomon Islands](#). Washington, DC, World Bank Group.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the fundamental role of building resilience in agricultural livelihoods and food systems. Lessons learned by those who have had to manage disasters indicate that it is critical to understand, monitor and anticipate the impacts of crises on agriculture and agricultural livelihoods early on. FAO and ECLAC, 2020. [Food systems and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). Rome, FAO.

¹ The grant programme "Improving the articulation between social protection and rural development interventions in developing countries: Lessons from Latin America and Africa" closed in March 2020

2. Learning summary – Bosnia

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IFAD response in Bosnia

When Bosnia and Herzegovina recorded its first cases of COVID-19, the government acted quickly to introduce strict containment measures, including the imposition of quarantine measures for goods and people at all border crossings. The country's heavy reliance on imports for its food supply meant there was a real risk of food shortages. The Government of Republika Srpska, one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's parliamentary entities, decided to incentivize the country's farmers to establish or increase production of staple crops.

In late March, the Government asked IFAD to repurpose Euro 1 million from the Rural Competitiveness Development Programme (RCDP), to respond to the adverse effects of COVID-19 on the country's poorest rural people. IFAD responded within two days and approved a support package for 9000 vulnerable households, including provision of vegetable seeds and seedlings, fertiliser and other inputs through RCDP's well-established implementation network. IFAD was able to put together procurement packages for tender that were fast, efficient, and in line with national legislation and procurement rules. This rapid response allowed farmers to start the planting season right on time and resulted in positive attention to IFAD at the height of the crisis.

Key success factors and emerging lessons from this experience include:

- i) Ability to identify needs and priorities fast, in close coordination with government and other stakeholders is critical to providing comprehensive responses and to avoiding duplication of work.
- ii) Government ownership is key. IFAD's actions responded directly to the Government's concerns about food security, and the urgent need to ensure continued functioning of the country's food systems.
- iii) Good connections and relationships of trust established within the Ministry of Agriculture also facilitated the rapid response.
- iv) Taking advantage of the networks of grassroots organizations already established within RCDP enabled better targeting and ensured that the emergency packages reached those most in need.
- v) Close collaboration across IFAD's divisions allowed the timely and efficient pooling of resources, expertise, knowledge, and energy required in an emergency.

allowing them to start planting season on time. It also increased access to local markets to sell high value crops, such as raspberries and pickled cucumbers. IFAD, 2020. [Fast and flexible: IFAD's first successful project restructuring protects smallholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#). Rome, IFAD.

2. Policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are being introduced in a very tight timeline. It would be extremely critical to ensure that fast-paced responses do not lead to increased corruption risks and practices leading to illicit financial flows. Olowo-Okere, E., 2020. [Can corruption risks be mitigated without hindering governments' COVID-19 response?](#) Washington, DC, World Bank.
3. Working closely with governments and local stakeholders at all levels is critical to gaining accurate and comprehensive understanding of needs and priorities in developing the plans and policies in response to the COVID-19 crisis. UNDP, 2020. [UNDP's support to the COVID-19 response in BiH: Humanity needs leadership and solidarity to defeat COVID-19](#). Sarajevo, UNDP.

Actionable recommendations

1. Being able to act swiftly to form policy responses during a crisis like COVID-19 is critical to meet the emerging needs. However, it is also imperative to **ensure that portfolio repurposing and new operations meet minimum quality standards**. Particular focus should be given to maximizing resource utilization and minimizing operational risks, targeting vulnerable populations (for example indigenous peoples), and forming exit strategies. Repurposing operations in response to COVID-19 should remain focused and consistent with IFAD's mandate for a post-crisis scenario during IFAD12 and beyond
2. **Prioritizing government ownership of IFAD's crisis response is critical**. Repurposed operations should clearly respond to and be driven by government needs and priorities. While this may require more flexibility by IFAD's in the means of delivery, the goals and objectives should remain consistent with IFAD's mandate and strategic objectives.
3. **Enable an in-house environment for successful crisis response**. Flexible operational arrangements, space for innovation (and failure at times), streamlined knowledge flows and a shared communication strategy should maximize organizational performance.

Related knowledge resources, Bosnia

1. IFAD's first successful project restructuring in response to COVID-19 in Bosnia and Herzegovina distributed critical production inputs to horticulture farmers,