

# 2

## ZERO HUNGER



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## I. SUMMARY

COVID 19 has revealed the lingering weakness and inequalities in people's access to adequate food and nutrition. The UN report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the Asia and Pacific region for 2020 shows that progress on achieving food security and nutrition have slowed. As a whole, the Asia-Pacific region is not on track to achieve the 2030 targets of zero hunger and access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food for all. In the Asia and Pacific region, 1.9 billion people cannot afford a diverse food nor readily access fish, poultry, fruits, and vegetables, making it impossible for the poor to achieve healthy diets. COVID-19 and associated economic restrictions have exacerbated this situation with dire consequences for all people, particularly the poor and most vulnerable. COVID-19 is estimated to push an additional 24 million people into acute food insecurity in the region and globally contribute to a 14.3 percent increase in the prevalence of moderate or severe wasting among children under five years of age, equal to an additional 6.7 million children acutely malnourished.

Achieving SDG 2 requires an integrated systems approach, bringing together food, water and sanitation, health, social protection, and education systems to address the underlying and contributing factors of diets sustainably. Sustainable food systems play a critical role in achieving food and nutrition security for all. Concerted public and private action is needed to increase food access and utilization, improve food marketing and raise awareness and incentives to steer food consumption towards more diverse, healthy,



and balanced diets by populations, especially women, children, and the urban poor. More fundamental shifts towards food systems policies and strategies aligning production, consumption, health, and resource management are required to improve nutrition and advance towards zero-hunger policies, fundamentally shift consumption patterns and production processes, improve waste management systems, and transition toward a more circular economy approach. Digitalization of the farm and rural economy offers a powerful accelerator of change toward more sustainable and resilient food systems that guarantee food security and nutrition.

## II. CURRENT STATUS

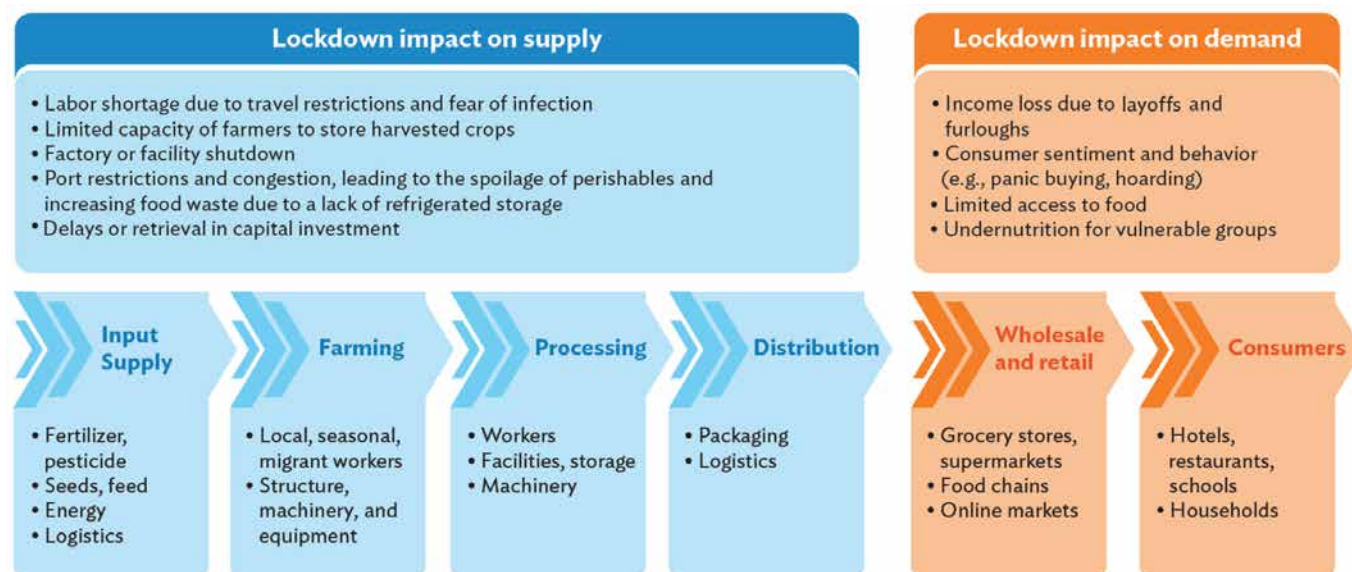
According to the 2020 Asia and Pacific Regional Overview of food security and Nutrition, 350.6 million people in the Asia and Pacific region are estimated to have been undernourished in 2019, nearly 51 percent of the global total. An estimated 74.5 million children under five years of age were stunted, and a total of 31.5 million were wasted in the Asia and Pacific region. The majority of these children in the region live in Southern Asia, with 55.9 million stunted and 25.2 million wasted children.

Undernutrition is persistent among school-aged children and adolescents, but overweightness and obesity are also on the rise, increasing the risk of diet-related non-communicable diseases. The risk of malnutrition is especially high among adolescent girls due to the region's high rates of early marriage and childbearing, particularly in South Asia, where 30 percent of girls are married before 15. Not only does this jeopardize their opportunities for adequate education and nutrition, but it can also lead to low birthweights among their children, thus perpetuating an intergenerational cycle of malnutrition.

The impact of COVID-19 on households' access, affordability, and consumption of nutritious diets is multifaceted, with direct implications to countries' ability to achieve SDG 2. School closures across the region may have led to missed meals and nutrition education normally provided through school programs. The lockdowns restricted access to essential nutrition services through the health center. In many countries of the region, COVID-related business closures and reduced movements has negatively affected farmers' incomes by reducing their ability to transport or market their products (drop of demand, export disruptions), limiting households' ability to afford nutritious foods. Rising unemployment and subsequent decline in household incomes caused by the economic contraction have made food, especially nutritious food, less affordable for many people. Disruptions to fresh food markets and concern over COVID pushed people to shift demand towards staple, processed food, not entirely healthy nor nutritious. Consumption of these foods, such as instant noodles, crisps, puffs, and sweets, is associated with an increased risk of overweightness, obesity, and NCDs. These foods also lack vitamins and minerals essential for growth and development.



ADB has come up with a diagram that captures the impact of COVID-19 on food systems.



Source: ESCAP Online Survey, 2020

Monitoring the progress towards SDG2 has been hindered by the lack of established regular monitoring and reporting mechanisms in several countries. The need to track progress towards SDG2 is even more pertinent in light of COVID-19. According to an online survey carried out by ESCAP and targeting governments, NGOs, universities, and international organizations, 40 percent of respondents said they are positive and confident that SDG 2 can be achieved despite COVID-19. In comparison, 20 percent of respondents were neutral and 40% negative. Among the concerns raised amongst respondents were the difficulties in data access and quality. Of the respondents, 80 percent consider COVID-19 negatively impacting SDG 2, while one in five respondents is neutral or feel no effect. However, there is also some perception that despite the COVID-19 resource allocation disruption, governments are believed able to achieve the SGD goals in the end. The key challenges identified for SDG 2 under COVID-19 are the increased risk of hunger, malnutrition, poverty, and rising inequality, coupled with difficulty collecting data necessary to inform strategic modification of food systems to ensure nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable diets for everyone.

## A. AREAS WHERE GOOD PROGRESS IS MADE

Despite the critical barriers presented by COVID 19, some countries have achieved zero hunger and malnutrition in the last year. Below are examples of food sector-specific achievements:

- **Philippines:** The Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP) utilizes the Vulnerability and Suitability Assessment (VSA) to determine a particular area's vulnerability and suitability that could affect a specific commodity's production. The VSA facilitates the ranking of municipalities and identifies areas where particular commodities can be best grown or raised. The Expanded VSA (eVSA) is a Geographic Information System (GIS)-based tool that considers the combined analysis of vulnerability and suitability and socio-economic conditions of a particular area. The information is used to enhance the GIS-based targeting of interventions and formulate strategies that enhance production and investments' climate resilience. In the PRDP, the tool is essential for Value Chain Analysis (VCA), an approach in determining whether priority agricultural commodities are within the value chain that is viable for investment.



- In Asia and the Pacific, governments reacted quickly to adjust their existing social protection programs to support the most vulnerable needs in response to COVID-19. Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Mongolia, Cambodia, the Philippines, Timor Leste, Pakistan, the Cook Island, and the Republic of Korea dramatically increased both the enrollment of vulnerable households such as those with young children and increased the benefit transferred to households; increasing the purchasing power of millions of households in the region. Several governments implemented successful efforts to ensure vulnerable school-age children and adolescents continued to receive school meals, despite school closures. India's Kerala State Government delivered food for usual midday meals to cover 300 000 children studying in more than 30 000 rural childcare centers closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Health systems were able to pivot in response to COVID-19 restrictions on movement, ensuring access to essential nutrition services for the most vulnerable. Countries shifted the provision of nutrition counseling and education services to online and mobile platforms, ensuring women and caregivers could access timely skilled counseling for themselves, their infants, and young children. Delivery of essential services such as screening and treatment for acute malnutrition, micronutrient supplementation, multi-micronutrient powders, and iron-folic acid supplementation faced immediate restrictions in the first quarter of 2020 but were quickly reestablished with the strengthening of community-level platforms..
- The quality and reliability of data are critical for nutrition policy, planning, and financial decisions. In Lao PDR, the National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN) strengthens the capacity of key institutions to collect and manage quality nutrition data to influence policy and decision-making in the country. The technical support provided by NIPN and other partners to the Government has helped to develop data collection capacity and tools and encouraged the use of nutrition data in primary documents, which are critical steps for improving nutrition information management in Lao PDR. A number of countries have launched SDG websites for monitoring and information sharing including Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The latter launched a national SDG website launched in April 2019 to monitor and share information on 17 SDGs and the establishment of an inter-agency task on Zero Hunger; promoting food policies, coordination and rationalization of efforts by government agencies and promote a whole-of-Government approach in attaining zero hunger.



## B. AREAS REQUIRING SPECIFIC ATTENTION AND ASSOCIATED KEY CHALLENGES

The food systems in the Asia and the Pacific region are facing considerable challenges. These challenges are mainly related to economic growth, rapid urbanization and globalization, changing dietary patterns and choices, climate change, increasing risk of disasters, persistent conflicts, and growing inequity. These macro-level issues are further compounded by COVID 19 related factors, including sporadic disruption of health and nutrition services and food supply chains, strict regulation of fresh food markets and movement restrictions, and a shift in consumer demand towards highly processed food, which is easily available, inexpensive and easy to store due to long shelf life.

The key challenges to achieving SDG 2 in Asia and the Pacific include:

### *Disruptions to school-based nutrition programs due to COVID-19*

School health and nutrition services for school-age children, including school meals, have been significantly disrupted during COVID-19 due to school closure. For close to 100 million students in Asia and the Pacific, school closures also meant missing out on nutritious school meals and other essential services. These disruptions put additional pressure on vulnerable households, some of whom have lost their livelihoods due to limited market activities or work suspension in the fields due to the pandemic.

In Cambodia, the temporary suspension of the Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programme also impacted the smallholder farmers who had previously supplied locally produced food and were highly dependent on this income source, showing the inter-dependency of issues.

### *Lack of regular information on household food security and markets*

There is no regular established data collection system for household food security in many countries of this region. The frequency of government-led national surveys is once per year in the best scenario. Market prices are available, but there is a gap of information on how markets are functioning. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the lack of surveillance system in many countries in Asia and the Pacific to monitor the household food security and market situation; and due to COVID-19 restrictions, face-to-face surveys were not possible.

### *Weak administrative data systems for nutrition*

Another lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic has been the difficulty of collecting relevant nutrition indicators in the absence of the possibility of conducting face-to-face surveys. There is scope for remote data collection of dietary indicators such as the Minimum Acceptable Diet or Women's Dietary Diversity. However, systems are not in place to permit this at scale. Consequently, the impact of the economic and other consequences of COVID -19, such as the suspension of health services, or scale-up of services such as social assistance on diets and nutrition, has been difficult to assess.



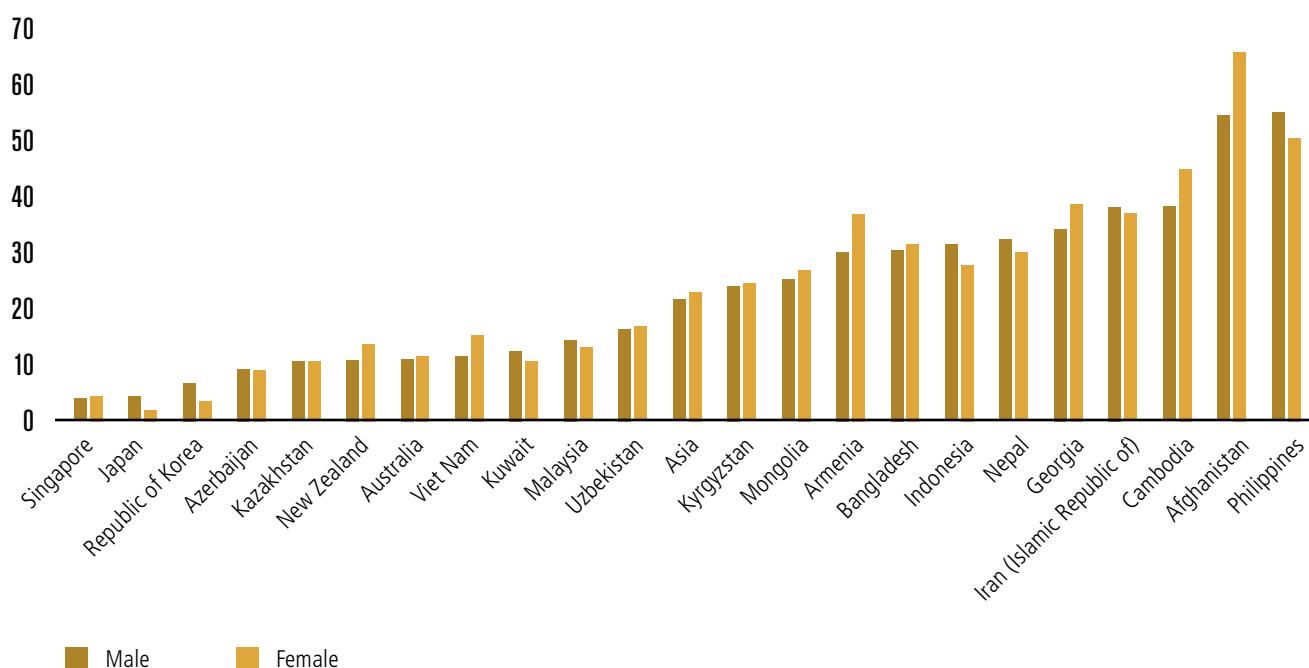
## C. INTEGRATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

Realizing the right to food requires going beyond zero hunger, around which Goal 2 is rooted. It addresses deeply rooted and wide-spread marginalization and inequalities that undermine the availability, adequacy, accessibility, and sustainability of food systems. Therefore, the full realization of Goal 2 goes through the realization of all the other Goals and the empowerment of those left behind. As the primary duty bearers, States need to tackle the key drivers of hunger and malnutrition, prioritizing policy reforms that remove existing barriers to the enjoyment of the right to food and adopting legal protections that eliminate inequality and exclusion.

Achievements in the realization of Goal 2 also require the meaningful participation of those experiencing inequalities and marginalization, including women, children, indigenous peoples, rural communities, migrants, and internally displaced persons.

**Women continue to experience high rates of food insecurity.** As the number of people affected by hunger is on the rise, the world is far from reaching zero hunger by 2030.<sup>1</sup> According to 2.1.1 data, Prevalence of undernourishment (%) was 14.3% in 2000 and 8.3% in 2019 and women continue to experience food insecurity more than men (in 60 percent of countries, women are more likely to be food insecure). The prevalence of anemia,<sup>2</sup> a marker of malnutrition, is also high among women in the region compared to the global average of 33 percent. An estimated 36 percent of women in Asia and the Pacific are anemic,<sup>3</sup> leading to pregnancy complications, severe fatigue, and heart problems (**Target 2.2**). Shifting from quantity to quality diets – by introducing nutritious foods high in vitamins, iron, and folate, can help improve women's health, particularly in Southern Asia, where the prevalence is highest.

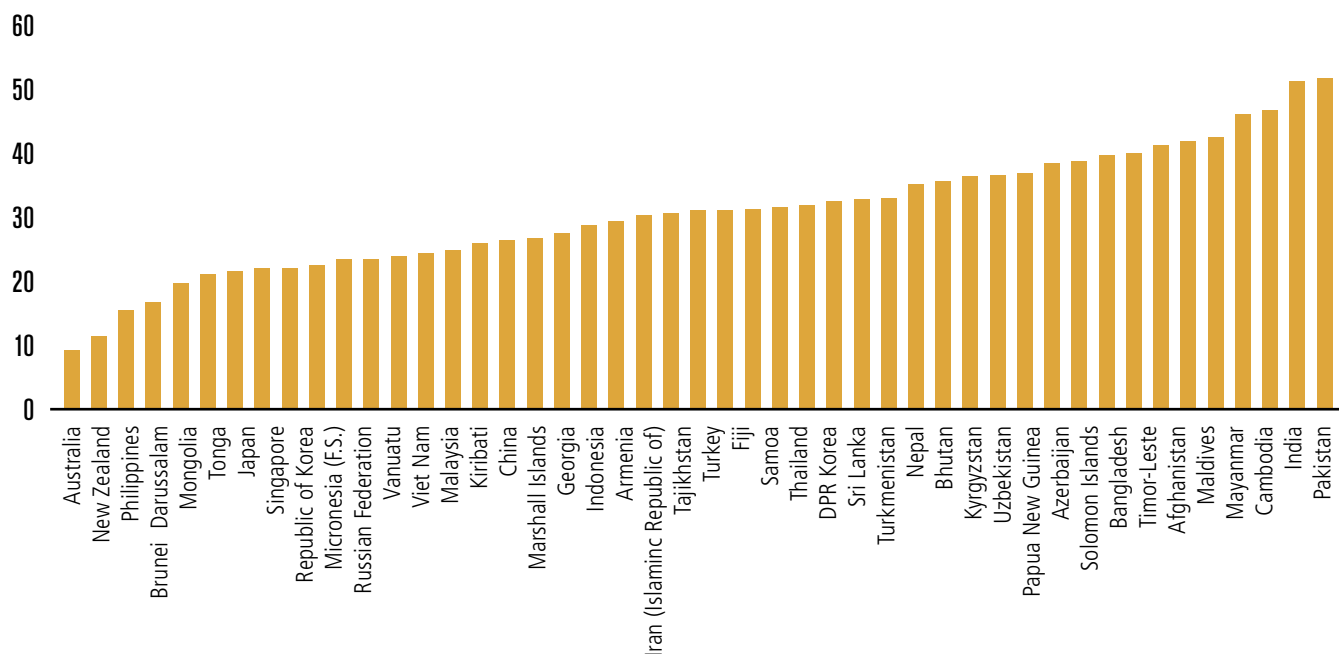
**Figure 1:** Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity among population aged 15+, by sex, latest available year (percentage)





**Target 2.2:** By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.

**Figure 2:** Prevalence of anemia among women of reproductive age (15-49) 2016 (percentage)



Source: FAOSTAT, last accessed 14th December 2020

### III. PROMISING INNOVATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

Throughout the Asia and Pacific region, there is growing consensus on developing food policies using food systems frameworks, which translate into giving increased importance to food access and to nutrition in addition to food supply and production. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments are committed to generalizing social protection and safety net measures to improve access to nutritious foods for the poor and most vulnerable, especially the urban poor. Greater awareness and significance are given to urban food production (e.g., the Philippines), and urban agriculture is a promising area to address malnutrition in increasingly urbanized populations. There is also growing interest in short value chains enabled by distributions networks and e-commerce and supported by peri-urban agriculture around small towns and secondary cities. However, this needs to go hand-in-hand with social assistance programs benefitting the urban poor. The urban food systems need to be able to deliver affordable, nutritious foods overall.

Another promising area is the accelerated digital transformation of the food economy with the potential to improve the efficiency of food value chains, strengthen regulation of unhealthy food marketing, and facilitate access and affordability to more diverse, nutritious, and healthy food.





### *Remote data collection to monitor vulnerabilities and inform decision making*

The lack of accessibility due to social distancing and lockdown brought some opportunities for learning on alternative ways to collect critical food security and livelihood data among affected and vulnerable populations remotely. In times of crisis, collecting these types of data helps better understand vulnerabilities and monitor household food security and nutrition outcomes in affected areas.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some governments and partners relied increasingly on remote data collection, like phone surveys, to monitor household food security and impact on livelihood, including in new emerging areas (e.g., urban or peri-urban) and categories of vulnerable people (e.g., workers in the informal sector) not necessarily covered by regular surveys prior to the crisis. Technology and tools have been improved and adjusted for remote data collection. The new approach to data collection has allowed governments and partners to automate data analysis and visualize information in almost real-time dashboards for timely action and response to shocks. This has opened up new opportunities for food security surveillance systems to remotely monitor household and community level food security in remote areas and hotspots.

Also, the impact of COVID-19 on retail and food prices has highlighted the importance of regularly monitoring food prices and market functionality. Governments and partners have also used remote data collection for traders' surveys, which have been undertaken in several countries such as Afghanistan, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Nepal during the pandemic. This information has proven valuable to understand better how markets are functioning or impacted by shocks to interpret price change and volatility better.

### *Strengthening and expanding nutrition-sensitive social protection for the most vulnerable*

To mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 for vulnerable people, many governments in Asia and the Pacific have used social assistance programs through horizontal and vertical expansion.

The Government of the Philippines, for example, introduced a vertical expansion of the existing Social Amelioration Program (SAP) to provide an emergency cash subsidy to 18 million households. Since March 2020, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) (with technical support from partners) set up a nation-wide remote mobile monitoring system to assess the effect of the government's cash transfer on food security and livelihoods. The inclusion of non-beneficiary households and use of a longitudinal approach is expected to allow stronger conclusions about the outcomes of the SAP in terms of targeting the most vulnerable and impact on household food security,

In Asia and the Pacific, school closures affected over 220 million students, affecting their education and preventing them from accessing nutritious school meals. In response to that, governments of Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Philippines and Sri Lanka, for example have modified their approach to continue providing assistance including providing the provision of take-home rations or cash.). In response to school closures, governments have modified their approach to continuing to provide assistance in multiple ways, including providing or supporting the provision of take-home rations.





## Scaling up fortification

In India, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought affordability and equitable access to healthy and nutritious foods to the forefront of the policy agenda. Hence, the Government of India has accelerated the expansion of its rice fortification program to the entire Public Distribution System to enhance access to nutrient-rich foods to vulnerable populations.

The pandemic has reiterated the importance of an adequate nutrient intake and healthy diets for peoples' well-being, resistance, and health. Social assistance programs are an important platform for providing access to nutritious foods and healthy diets for the neediest.

## IV. PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

The outcomes of the round table on Sustainable Development Goal 2 were informed by the relevant goal profile and focused attention on the following action areas for Asia and the Pacific.

1. **Further investment and strong public- and private partnerships in food systems.** It is important to make nutritious food more affordable to people so that more people can access a healthy diet. Efficient value chains can contribute to making healthy food more affordable. Even if people can afford a healthy diet communication and education are also necessary so that people can make informed choices. Healthy diets can be promoted with social media, for example. Providing women with training on nutritious and healthy food in collaboration with the public and private sector should be considered to improve food security and nutrition. Food fortification can be one path forward to improve nutrition with use of technologies. Keeping a good taste of food is an important factor to respond to consumer demands.
2. **Investing in cost-effective technologies for data collection, and improved surveillance to monitor nutrition, food security, and livelihood indicators.** Action is needed to respond to a host of issues in terms of data governance in food systems to avoid increasing inequality, while promoting data privacy and transparency (part of human rights). Participants underlined that collection of data is not neutral: it can help to monitor progress on Goal 2, but it can also be misused for proprietary gains. Policy measures in this regard need to assess a variety of aspects about digitalization: from technologies to infrastructure, and governance and market aspects along food chains.
3. **Upscaling digitalization across the food system from production to consumption, improve access to food markets and nutrition by all.** Digitalization offers great promise for transforming food systems, adding values and improving efficiency. However, upscaling need to be matched with robust measures to narrow the digital divide and create enabling conditions to expand the digital innovations and possibilities to the excluded and women. Evidence-based policies to ensure inclusive access, avoid further exclusion, especially for rural households lacking access to internet or digital skills. In addition, digitalization policies need safeguards to avoid exclusion (employment, access to markets and nutritious foods) and to reduce the digital divide between countries, rural-urban and, and between women and girls and their male counterparts. Digitalization require investments in basic transport and information and communications technology infrastructure, extension services and other enabling conditions.
4. **Strengthening urban agriculture, local food production, and short value chains to improve nutrition and access to food among the urban poor.** The role of governments is critical to local food and shorter food chains governance and to integrating this issue into urban planning. Many countries in the region have moved to promote urban food gardening, especially following COVID-19



pandemic. The role of local government in regulating and providing incentives is critical, including facilitating access to underutilized lots for urban gardening. Also highlighted was the impact of ambient air pollution, residual water and its impact on urban food quality. Likewise the use of pesticides for food production can also increase pollution in urban settings. Urban food governance require policies, regulations and infrastructure support for sustainable urban food development protective of the environment and human health.

5. **Leveraging social protection system to enhance food security and nutrition outcomes.** 'This requires collaboration with other sectors such as health, education and agriculture, as well as involvement of civil society'
6. **Stronger investments in disaster and pandemic preparedness needed across the systems.** Investing in education and research as part of endeavours to strengthen disaster and pandemic preparedness. Disaster and pandemic preparedness systems need to overcome existing biases in favour of urban versus rural areas, and in favour of large private sector actors, particularly in light of decreasing public investments in agriculture. Governments need to invest in stronger disaster preparedness, early warning, monitoring, and response systems
7. **Increase women's access to productive resources, markets, training and technology to meet the agricultural productivity and nutrition targets.** In order to meet the agricultural productivity and nutrition targets, it is important that we understand the challenges that women face such as lack of access and opportunities, depending on the country-specific situation. It is important to tackle vulnerabilities of women in agriculture, including the issue of gender-based violence and lack of access to related services in rural areas. Women should be engaged in policy-making process such as those that determine access to productive assets such as land. Women also need better opportunities for training and skill development adapted to their needs. Engaging women in urban agriculture is critical and require facilitating access to farming equipment, space for production and marketing opportunities through inclusive procurement.



## ANNEX

The official indicator framework for **SDG 2** with targets and indicators.

Target	Indicator	Status of indicator (Tier)	Latest data available	Comments (Proxies)
<b>2.1</b> By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round	<b>2.1.1</b> Prevalence of undernourishment (PoU)	I	2019	Current status close to target but the situation is one of stagnation
	<b>2.1.2</b> Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)	I	2019	Current status is far from target and situation has deteriorated since 2019 and more so in 2020 (due to COVID-19).
<b>2.2</b> By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.	<b>2.2.1</b> Prevalence of stunting <b>2.2.2</b> Prevalence of malnutrition <b>2.2.3</b> Prevalence of anaemia in women aged 15 to 49 years	I		
<b>2.3</b> By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.	<b>2.3.1</b> Volume of production per labour unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size <b>2.3.2</b> Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status	II	2005-2015 (farm income for selected countries)	Insufficient data to assess progress; available data from 2005 to 2015 for some countries show small scale producers incomes are less than half those of large producers (FAO)
<b>2.4</b> By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices (...increase productivity; production, maintain ecosystems, strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change (...).	<b>2.4.1</b> Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture	II		

Continued ▼



<p><b>2.5</b> By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species (...), through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks...promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.</p>	<p><b>2.5.1.a</b> Number of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in medium-or long-term conservation facilities</p> <p><b>2.5.1.b</b> Number of animal genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in medium-or long-term conservation facilities</p>	I	2019	<p>(2.5.1.a) Improvements - Net increases in genebank holdings in 2019 in most countries (from 2015)</p> <p>(2.5.1.b.) insufficient data to measure progress (from 2010 to 2019, number of local breeds with sufficient material stored in genebanks increased from 10 to 101; fraction of 7200 breeds reported worldwide)</p>
<p><b>2.a</b> Increase investment, (rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks) (...).</p>	<p><b>2.a.1</b> The agriculture orientation index for government expenditures</p> <p><b>2.a.2</b> Total official flows (official development assistance plus other official flows) to the agriculture sector</p>	I	2018	<p>Deterioration since baseline year – general decline in government expenditures from 2001 to 2018 in agriculture from 1.73 % to 1.48 % leading to a decline in the World average Agricultural Orientation Index.</p>
<p><b>2.b</b> Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets (...).</p>	<p><b>2.b.1</b> Agricultural export subsidies</p>	I		<p>2020 evidence show some localized and temporary discriptions of trade flows due to COVID affecting some food commodities (perishable, animal products) more than others (staples, cereals) (FAO 2020)</p>
<p><b>2.c</b> Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets ( ...).</p>	<p><b>2.c.1</b> Indicator of food price anomalies</p>	I		<p>Assessment not easy given the methodological characteristics of the indicator</p>



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## ENDNOTES

1. FAO (2020). <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/CA9692EN.pdf>
2. Indicator 2.2.3: Prevalence of anemia in women aged 15 to 49 years. Anemia is a condition in which the number and size of red blood cells, or the hemoglobin concentration, falls below an established cut-off value, consequently impairing the blood's capacity to transport oxygen around the body.
3. The regional aggregate for women who have anemia is calculated for estimates obtained from FAOSTAT, using population weights for women ages 15–49.



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