



Guidance for emergency livestock actions in the context of COVID-19: addressing emerging needs related to the pandemic and reprogramming ongoing critical activities.

Introduction

This document seeks to provide guidance to all partners and stakeholders, including governments and players along the livestock value chain, in contexts already experiencing or at risk of high levels of acute food insecurity in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 impacts are being felt across the world. For people in fragile contexts already experiencing humanitarian emergencies, the pandemic could push them into a full-blown food crisis. This document therefore complements other guidance notes, including the FAO Policy Brief on *Mitigating the Impacts of COVID-19 on the Livestock Sector*.

Up to 80 percent of these populations rely on some form of agricultural production for their survival, many employing a mix of crop and livestock rearing, along with informal employment. Livestock contributes 40 percent of the global value of agricultural input and supports the livelihoods and food security of almost 1.3 billion people. Beyond its direct role in generating food and income, livestock is a valuable asset, serving as a store of wealth, collateral for credit, and an essential safety net during times of crisis¹. At the same time, smallholder livestock owners are increasingly becoming vulnerable to food insecurity due to recurrent climatic shocks, conflicts and economic crises.

Restrictions on movement during efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic are affecting the livelihoods of livestock-owning households. For example, through reduced access to animal health care, inputs, markets, and even to pastures and water. There is a high risk that these populations could adopt negative coping mechanisms, like the sale of livestock at much reduced prices, which would have long-term implications for their food security. In the short term, poor terms of trade and limited access to markets to sell or buy food items and inputs will potentially exacerbate already high levels of acute food insecurity. Poor livestock conditions – resulting from less access to veterinary care or sources of feed and forage – would also have serious implications on the health and nutrition status of children.

The guidance focuses on livestock emergency interventions outlined by the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) namely; the provision of animal health services, emergency feeding and water supplies, shelter provision, destocking (marketing, slaughtering) and restocking. The LEGS core standards of coordination and advocacy are considered, as they are an important aspect to focus on during the current crisis.

The use of cash programming and technologies (including information technology) as appropriate is important across the various interventions in enhancing safe and swift delivery of livestock inputs, products and services in adherence to the guidance from World Health Organization and governments on COVID-19. These are also important for programming in terms of traceability for follow up, monitoring and evaluation.

¹ [FAO 2016, Guidance note on Livestock in protracted crises: The importance of livestock for resilience-building and food security of crisis-affected populations](#)

This paper is made possible through the active engagement of partners² in the livestock subgroup of the global food security cluster technical working group on COVID-19. The partners are from field and headquarters levels; it is envisaged that the partners and stakeholders will adapt this guidance across the livestock value chain to the various contexts and cycles of livestock production, programming as well the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

COVID-19 impacts are being felt across the world. However, for people in fragile contexts already experiencing humanitarian emergencies, the pandemic could push them into a full-blown food crisis.

In many of the most vulnerable contexts, food crises are likely- and have begun- to emerge as lockdowns and the economic downturns take effect. It is therefore critical that efforts to prevent a health crisis be extended to avert a food crisis, the impacts of which are likely to be long lasting and devastating to lives and livelihoods.

The 2020 edition of the [Global Report on Food Crises](#) shows 135 million people experienced acute food insecurity in 2019 - the type that requires humanitarian assistance. A further 183 million were on the verge of crisis, in “stressed” food security conditions. A further shock or additional stresses, like necessary restrictions on the movement of people and goods associated with preventing the spread of COVID-19, could quickly push them over the edge.

The COVID-19 pandemic is directly affecting food systems through impacts on food supply and demand, and indirectly through decreases in purchasing power, the capacity to produce and distribute food, and the intensification of care tasks. These will have differentiated impacts and harsher effects on the poor and vulnerable. Families are already being affected by a decline in their purchasing power, while simultaneously facing surging prices in local markets for some food items, unavailability of products due to supply chain disruptions and containment policies that could limit access to markets. Such impacts will significantly affect the lives and livelihoods of already vulnerable households dependent on food production and livestock rearing in particular.

Despite a tendency to be inelastic, the demand for food is at risk of declining, particularly in poorer countries and for higher value products. Uncertainty is increasing social tensions, particularly among the poorest and most vulnerable, and conflict, with farmer-herder conflicts reported in volatile contexts, such as Nigeria. At household-level, women and girls often bear the brunt of COVID-19-related restrictions, with increased reports of gender-based violence being recorded worldwide.

Measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 include strong restrictions of movement that dramatically change daily lives and affect agricultural livelihoods. These measures are particularly difficult for the rural poor and most vulnerable, who tend to hold occupations that cannot be performed remotely, and are often excluded from social protection systems. Given that up to 80 percent of the 135 million people currently experiencing acute food insecurity rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, protecting food supply chains is crucial.

The livelihoods of livestock producers are extremely exposed to the impacts of the pandemic, particularly transhumant pastoralists and women – who make up a large portion of backyard livestock (small ruminants, poultry) producers, processors and vendors in informal markets.

² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS), Mercy Corps, Plan International and World Food Programme (WFP).

Livestock supply chains are liable to be hit by the pandemic, with significant implications for pastoralist households, especially in Africa's drylands. For example, in East Africa, transhumant pastoralists rely heavily on the Middle Eastern markets during Ramadan and Eid as a main source of income, movement restrictions thus threaten their entire year's income and food access. Border closures, restrictions on movement of people, and the closing of usual transhumant routes would leave pastoralists with limited, if any, access to forage, water and markets for their livestock (and products), and potentially reignite existing tensions between livelihood groups. Should vaccination and treatment campaigns be halted or slowed and veterinary service provision stopped at a local level, endemic diseases could quickly take hold, destroying herds and livelihoods, and undermining the food security of presently extremely vulnerable groups. Transportation restrictions and lack of storage facilities could also hinder efforts to move feed and other critical supplies to those in need.

Further details on the likely impacts of COVID-19 on livestock production can be found [here](#).

Guidance across the various Livestock interventions

The livestock guidance covers emergency livestock interventions outlined in the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) [handbook](#)³ as well as the Livestock-related interventions during emergencies – [The how-to-do-it manual](#)⁴. The scope of these activities is typically: the provision of animal health services, emergency feeding and water supplies, shelter provision, destocking (marketing, slaughtering) and restocking.

This guidance document seeks to highlight the importance of each activity, the potential impact of COVID 19 on it in terms of livelihoods, food security and nutrition. It also proposes measures that would enable livestock owners as well as stakeholders to keep the production and flows through the livestock value chain. These are for consideration at the various field locations, with due regard to their specific context and stage of the COVID-19 pandemic (before, during and after) as well as their livestock production and programming cycles. [LEGS Guidance Note](#) on COVID-19 highlights tools and information that may be of use in the assessment and planning for current and future livestock-based responses.

1. Livestock (product) trade and marketing

Access to markets and opportunities for continued trade is critical as it is the only means by which livestock owner households, especially pastoralists, obtain income (food diversification, healthcare and education) besides exchanging livestock breeds and types. Livestock offtake is indeed a time sensitive issue in view of seasonality and market prices. For example, in the Horn of Africa the main rainy season (March, April, and May) is well underway, the livestock fetch good prices due to good body conditions and are high in demand due to the holy month of Ramadan besides other festivities. Missing this peak season has ramifications for food security, income, and herd dynamics for the entire year and beyond, delaying these communities' recovery from repeated crises. Somalia's export to the Middle East, estimated at 2.5 million goats and sheep (value about USD. 125 million), may be lost if the movement of livestock and people for Hajj (to Mecca and Medina) does not occur due to COVID-19. This has far-reaching impacts, beyond households, to the national economy.

It is therefore crucial that the cross border trade flows for livestock, products, as well as inputs and services continue unhindered with strict adherence to requisite hygiene, sanitary and phytosanitary measures to protect people from COVID-19 as well as livestock from diseases, pests, or contaminants of products.

³ LEGS. 2014. Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards, 2nd edition.

⁴ FAO. 2016. Livestock-related interventions during emergencies – The how-to-do-it manual. Edited by Philippe Ankers, Suzan Bishop, Simon Mack and Klaas Dietze. FAO Animal Production and Health Manual No. 18. Rome.

- Livestock markets need to operate within measures that reduce the risk of spreading the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The local governments should regulate access and functioning in order to secure the markets in accordance with stipulated guidance of the World Health Organization (WHO) and measures by the government.
- Open livestock markets are encouraged with the requisite physical distance of 1-2 meters being observed. The authorities operating the markets should provide guidance such as markings for safe negotiations among traders and security services for orderly operations.
- Promote decentralized markets to reduce overcrowding and the need to travel. The stakeholders in the markets (traders and livestock keepers, veterinary officers, marketing authorities etc.) should be kitted with the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) and utilize them properly. Ensure the provision of hand washing stations in the markets.
- Provide targeted support (e.g. cash transfers) to vulnerable, high-risk groups that should minimize their risk of exposure to COVID-19, such as pregnant women, elderly and disabled people, to enable them to stay at home as well as maintain their access to nutritious food and meet other basic needs.
- Disseminate awareness information on COVID-19 in local languages; written (billboard, text messages) or oral through radio or announcement at markets or around the city on market days to the public. For example, discourage handshakes, (or use disposable gloves) which are a normal way of confirming that a deal is reached: other non-physical options should be explored as appropriate within the local cultures.
- Encourage the use of mobile money transfers to minimize exchange of cash monies at markets or ensure the people transacting have gloves and correct PPE.
- In order to minimize food loss, promote food safety practices in the handling of livestock products (milk, meat, eggs etc). This can be done through building/strengthening of cold chain systems (carcass transportation) as well as storage equipment and facilities in places where flows are slower than usual, and logistics delays are observed. Promote collective action by livestock owners (economies of scale) through cooperatives and collection centers to ensure cost effectiveness and efficiency e.g. in transportation to markets. The use of IT and telephony be encouraged for scheduling of activities (collections, deliveries and logistics) where possible to minimize gathering and physical contact.
- Support the traditional preservation of food with hygiene measures in case of a need to destock when there is no access to markets, and to maintain nutritious foods (e.g. dehydration of salted meat/ fish and white cheese and yogurt production).
- Monitor changes in market demand for livestock products. COVID-19 related closures of international imports and exports, loss or threat of loss of consumer income, and closure of more informal market outlets (butcheries, wet markets, urban live animal markets) will affect end-market demand for livestock and livestock products. When available, review the existing end-market analysis to understand market segmentation within national and local livestock products (meat, offals, milk, eggs) to better estimate how changes in consumer practices will affect the demand for live animals, milk and eggs. For example, if a large percentage of live animals enter urban meat supply chains and the majority of that meat is sold through local butcherries, closure of those butcherries will cause reduced demand for live animals. Demand for carcasses may increase in supermarkets but it will take time for local processing systems to adjust.

- Urge local governments to refrain from blocking livestock movement/circulation routes, transport vehicles and closing down slaughterhouses, to ensure stable logistics. Consider the provision of set circulation and migratory routes to facilitate movement within the stipulated WHO and governments guidelines.
- Encourage national-level, government-led finance schemes, such as soft loans for agriculture and livestock sectors. Drawing from [China's experience](#), according to the World Bank, poultry farmers in the key regions were entitled to loan extensions and relaxed loan guarantee requirements in post-COVID-19. Consider the example of the Agricultural Development Bank of China's support by delaying the loan repayment and providing RBM 137 billion (USD 19.6 billion) worth of loans by March 14 2020. These experiences call for the need to advocate for [fiscal policy](#) such as tax cuts for small businesses.

2. Access to animal health services

Access to veterinary treatment and vaccinations at the right time is critical to livestock owners, as they may end up losing valuable animals, their production, or be cut off completely from markets due to outbreaks and spread of notifiable diseases. South Sudan for example will be at peak of the rains in June, if the livestock are not vaccinated against endemic diseases, the losses may be substantial as they are cut off by flooding. This may lead to starvation in some pastoral households who are wholly dependent on livestock.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, countries infected with African Swine Fever (ASF) in Asia have reduced their reporting of the disease, possibly due to changing priorities. In addition, control efforts to address ASF in Papua New Guinea at the end of March 2020 were hampered by the coinciding general lockdown due to COVID-19. This is exacerbated by a lack of awareness of the likely ban on the transport of pigs and pork products among livestock-owning communities who may continue informal markets that could facilitate the introduction/spread of ASF.

In the North of Cameroon and the Central Africa Republic, vaccination campaigns against PPR, CBPP and Newcastle disease are planned in May and June 2020 but many constraints, due to the Covid-19 measures and restrictions, are hampering the implementation with important consequences on the livelihood of pastoral communities. Restriction of movement by pastoralists and their herd, including across borders poses a great risk of animal diseases outbreaks. Disrupting routine movements e.g. from wet to dry season grazing areas during the rains may mean that livestock are held in restricted areas, pest infested areas such as ticks, tsetse fly, mosquitoes etc.

- It is important that disease surveillance and monitoring of risk factors be enhanced during the COVID-19 crisis in order to minimize the risk and exposure of livestock assets. Seasonality and weather related aspects are important to monitor. Somalia and Sudan for example risk losing the exports to the Middle East and reinstatement of ban if Rift Valley Fever occurs. There is, therefore, a need to closely monitor the current seasonal forecast to ensure that the livestock move if the thresholds for flooding that would encourage mosquito breeding are sighted.
- The pre-positioning of stocks of vaccines could be important in order to avoid uncontrolled rushes in the logistic chain and the centralization and focus of resources mainly on human health
- Vaccination of livestock be undertaken through small teams that observe the WHO regulations, preferably at homesteads to avoid having livestock common vaccination areas as is the norm.
- Collaboration with community based animal health workers (CAHWs) be enhanced as they are the service providers at the local level, ensuring that they are well equipped and linked to local government authorities, technical teams and the nearest agrovet dealers to maintain flows.

- Use of mobile phone applications on which livestock owners can seek help, ask questions, and get advice as well as access drugs from nearby agrovet dealers. An example of a drug and wellness products delivery service is Kenya's [MyDawa](#) online (mobile) pharmacy.
- Link up agrovet dealers with each other and with larger input suppliers to facilitate joint procurement and delivery by suppliers for example through cooperatives.
- Public Health and Veterinary Services should work together using a One Health approach to share information, assessments and service delivery to livestock keepers as may be feasible at the local level ([OIE Questions and Answers on the COVID-19](#)). This can be valuable in covering highly mobile pastoralists who are difficult to reach, for example, through mobile clinics for human and livestock health already experienced in Mali. This should include messaging to the general public on the safety of livestock products and transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- Integrate the One Health approach in the training of the CAHWs, to promote their contribution to biosecurity, food hygiene and sanitary practices among pastoralists. For example in Afghanistan the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan has trained CAHWs (called Veterinary Field Units (VFU)) and is exploring their linkages with Community Health workers to address zoonotic diseases and common messaging. The VFU are to assist with the provision of disinfectants, PPE and other inputs/information to communities.

3. Livestock feed access and supplies

Access to grazing areas as well as feed supplies may be affected by movement restrictions and delays along the supply chain. Pastoralist patterns of migration will be disrupted by border closures as well as internal human movement controls. It is therefore important to ensure continued dialogue between pastoralists and government authorities in order to identify suitable movement options. This will also help in ensuring that livestock access the appropriate feed and natural resources as well as mitigating conflict, including farmers-herders conflict. Liptako-Gourma area (across the Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso) and Lake region of Chad in West Africa are particularly affected by multiple shocks such as conflicts and drought. The COVID-19 restrictions are hampering the normal transhumant movements across states and the access to the humanitarian aids (particularly feed provision). Advocacy is needed not only to minimize the limitations of the transhumance as the only adaptive mechanism to the climatic variability and environmental shock in the Sahel belt but also to open humanitarian corridors with due consideration to COVID-19 hygienic measures.

The provision of livestock feed to small holders or pastoralists whose herds (lactating and pregnant) are left at home due to drought or strained supply chains. In East Africa for example, there are recorded feed shortfalls due to desert locust, in addition to COVID-19, these households will be further strained. Cash or voucher interventions alongside the feed are important to ease pressure on the vulnerable households and to enable them obtain other supplementary feed inputs including vitamins, especially for pregnant and lactating herds. The registration for cash plus programming needs to be undertaken with care and due consideration to all measures against the spread of COVID-19. Awareness creation and information of the public e.g. through radio together with the governments including at local levels should be considered.

Support stockpiling and steady flows of animal feeds for livestock (chicken, pigs, zero grazing units) among smallholders, due to the disruptions in supply chain.

4. Provision and access to water

Movement needs to be facilitated to allow access to critical watering resources. If there is severe scarcity of water, provision for lactating and breeding herds should be considered with due adherence to WHO regulations.

5. Livestock shelter and settlement

Provision of shelter is critical especially in extreme weather events to minimize loss of livestock especially kids, calves and lactating animals. This intervention may need consideration where other hazards, such as, flood, heat wave, earthquake, co-exist with the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Provision of livestock in the recovery phase

The provision of livestock to vulnerable households who are capable of taking good care of them is important. This activity is potentially of great value among internally displaced people (IDPs) as part of measures to decongest IDP camps; facilitating their return home or to settlement areas if they are safe. In South Sudan, for example, there is an opportunity to provide livestock as part of the return package to IDPs, especially those in the protection of civilians' sites which are at high risk of spread of COVID-19. Cash plus interventions to support these previously livestock dependent households is important during the transition period. Provision of livestock is helpful post COVID-19 in supporting households that would have lost their livestock assets.

7. Coordination and Advocacy

Actors across the livestock value chain can play a critical role in passing along messages related to COVID-19, including on health and safety measures and the reasons for closures and movement restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus. These actors will also be important in countering rumours and false information about the virus, its spread and potential treatment.

Examples include:

- Local radio as a means to share messages related to health and safety, but also to changes in planned vaccination or treatment campaigns (for example, new sites, limited numbers at a time, one member per family, etc.) or alerts on new regulations for bringing livestock to markets, price monitoring and demarcated livestock routes.
- Community animal health workers can be provided with simple messages in local languages on health and safety guidance.

In addition, community-level animal health workers, local veterinary extension workers and others who remain in close contact with households and communities during periods of movement restriction should be equipped with messaging on gender-based violence, including reporting, given the elevated risks of violence against women and girls during lockdowns. Where possible, efforts should be made to increase community-level service provision at this time and create networks between community animal health workers and social workers, especially in very remote areas where national extension services may have limited resources to reach.

Humanitarian and Development partners need to plan responses, together with the government, to coordinate response interventions so that they synergise rather than duplicate each other's efforts. Food Security Cluster meetings may be an appropriate forum for this coordination.

Key messages on COVID-19 and livestock-related issues should be articulated, agreed upon and widely disseminated at the local level to counter misinformation. For example, incidences have been recorded in some countries of considerable drops in the sale of livestock products as people fear they could be a source of virus transmission. Thus, messages must clearly explain how the disease is transmitted, as well as how to safely purchase, cook and consume livestock products. In particular, the pandemic provides an opportunity to

significantly increase investment in local-level animal health service providers, who will be on the frontlines in maintaining support to livestock owners during lockdowns and movement restrictions.

Advocacy will be crucial at higher levels, to encourage governments and local authorities to maintain livestock transhumant routes, trade routes, markets and service provision open to the degree possible, keeping in mind the importance of preventing the spread of COVID-19 to vulnerable populations who are ill-equipped to fight the virus. Such advocacy should be undertaken as much as possible jointly with other agencies and organizations in order to ensure coherence and amplification of messaging. COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the critical need for the institutionalization of the One Health approach in the context of fragile situations⁵.

The specific needs of livestock owners, and particularly nomadic pastoralists, are frequently overlooked in traditional humanitarian assistance. It is critical that governments, aid agencies, local authorities and all relevant actors take account of these groups when planning pandemic containment measures, responses, and medium and long-term actions to reduce the impact of these on national and local economies. Targets of such advocacy include line ministries related to livestock production and animal health, regional organizations, policy- and decision-makers in local and district authorities, UN, NGOs and other organizations involved in the humanitarian response (health and otherwise).

This guidance note was written with inputs from FAO, LEGS, ICRC, Plan International, Mercy Corps and WFP. The gFSC would like to thank all partners who have helped in preparing and reviewing this paper.



⁵ [African Union, 2020. COVID-19: How should the Animal resource sector in Africa respond?](#)