



## FSS COVID-19 Crisis Sitrep-01 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020

### Concerns and priority needs update

- At this stage of the outbreak, we cannot report significant additional food security related immediate caseload for the overall population, apart from approximately 3,000 people among those identified by the Health Cluster, and among those quarantined people who cannot provide for their basic food needs. This is so far quite a marginal share compared to the current figures of food insecure people.
- Nevertheless, food insecurity could be further increased because of COVID-19 outbreak, both in terms of quantity of people being affected, and the severity of the food insecurity conditions. This can be caused by decreased availability of food items, This crisis is new to Palestine, and it will be an addition to the existing limited economic access aspect, which is being the driving factor to food insecurity.
- Food insecurity in Palestine is already high (27%), particularly in Gaza Strip (62%) mainly due to poverty, unemployment, and reduced resilience. Unemployment levels are already high, especially in Gaza Strip (43% in Q4-2019). The addition potential risk of decreased availability represents another basic pillar of food security being under attack.
- Decreased access of food items may be caused over time by a) disruption of local value chains, which could determine market spikes of local produce, and b) disruption of regional or global value chains that could void the capacity of import to keep local prices low.
- With regard to the WFP-UNRWA joint food distribution programme to Bedouin and Herder communities in the West Bank, it was moved up to start (and indeed did so) on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March (rather than the 1<sup>st</sup> of April as previously scheduled) and is ongoing, starting in the North today (Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> of March). Protective equipment (masks, gloves, hygiene gel and coats) has been/is being procured and provided to the distribution teams, which are being trained by medical officers on how to use this equipment.
- In the case of over 1.2 million Palestine refugees and no refugees in Gaza Strip, who are dependent on UNRWA and WFP in-kind and e-voucher food assistance, there is a risk of disruption of operation should curfew restrictions be imposed on Gaza Strip. As of 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020, the first round of UNRWA food distribution covering Q1-2020 is yet to be completed with around 60,000 households still approaching UNRWA food distribution centres (DCs) for receipt of food baskets, UNRWA expanded distribution to 12 additional facilities (UNRWA schools) to avoid crowds and took special measures to reduce the risk on beneficiaries and staff. However; the current measures are assuming staff and refugees are able to reach the DCs, which might not be possible in case of curfew. ##### non-refugees assisted by WFP can be supported until June mainly through food e-voucher support; after that, this assistance is at risk due to insufficient funding.
- In light of declaring emergency in oPt, UNRWA closed down all schools, TVET centres and some other programmes providing community service (such as women programme centres), freeze of those activities caused either the suspension of some CfW opportunities (teaching), and UNRWA tried to accommodate ongoing CfW by placing them

whenever was possible to other positions that were needed due to COVID-19 preparation (e.g. security guards, cleaners, labourers). With high unemployment rate and protracted poverty, this will add further burden on poor Palestine refugees especially in the case of imposed curfew.

- An additional issue that may worsen the unemployment level is related to Palestinians who have been forbidden to work in the Settlements. Approximately 24,000 people may be affected by losing their livelihood. Most of Palestinians in West Bank working in Israel and Settlements work in the construction sector (65%), which absorbs 17.7% of the labour force of all economic activities. If this working force will become unemployed, the consequence on involved households and overall Palestinian, and Palestinian economy will be significant, and the food insecurity levels in West Bank will be expected to significantly increase, as well as new vulnerable groups emerging.
- Last week, due to the last windstorm. MoA reported that more than \$1.9m is the total loss in the agriculture sector; \$1.2m and \$0.7m in West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively, Farmers are facing difficulties in getting any support as very limited partners are able to reach them out due to the current access restrictions in place.
- As declared today by PA government, MoA staff will not be able to move at all, the basic veterinary services to keep animal production on are under risk, taking also in consideration animal diseases and possible zoonosis. In Gaza Strip, Council Personnel declared reduce work capacity to the very limited levels, this is expected to affect MoA and its services.
- Due to current situation Emergency response to demolition in the West Bank which includes assessment and responding will be stooped.

### **Response Framework**

COVID-19 situation is not a classical shock for any of the value chains, including those involving farmers and the food system. It is a dramatic change of the operating environment to which farmers and distributor need to quickly adapt to. Supporting this adaptation requires a wide range of support measures in short term and medium term to sustain production, without compromising safety of producers, their families, and communities.

The target population should be farmers and fishers to keep producing, workers in agri-food industry to be given clearance to move, and the most vulnerable people (elderly, sick, PLW, children U5) to be supported with reliable direct access to food.

In light of the possible coming impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on all value chains, agriculture can be seen as almost the main (if not the only) economic sector that can (and should) continue. Its vitality and criticality is not only for the producers (livelihoods) but also for the consumers (food security in terms of food availability and accessibility), especially in light of the expected slow-down of imports and further restrictions on mobility.

With a focus on support packages for the farming and fishing communities, the following should be considered:

### In the short-term:

- Supporting and working with relevant authorities to ensure safe access and movement of goods and people related to food production and services.
- Provision of essential production inputs to small scale farmers and herders (animal feed, animal shelters, green house covers, fertilizers, seeds and seedlings, plant protection and animal health measures, water reservoirs, etc) including for those affected by the extreme weather conditions, as well as by herbicides sprayings in the ARA of Gaza Strip.
- Support MoA to adapt and continue delivering critical services to farmers through in-kind assistance, and technical support to its related units, such as the provision of protective supplies (masks, disinfectants, etc).
- Support MoSD to provide direct food access and cash assistance to the workers in Settlements whom are expected to be extremely vulnerable.

### In the medium term:

- Supporting MoA and other relevant authorities to identify and implement regulatory measures, services and investments to adapt the agriculture sector and the food distribution systems to the new environment.
- Strengthening the national Sanitary and Phytosanitary System, as well as the extension services for the livestock sector.

With a focus on ensuring direct access to food:

- Supporting already planned activities that provide direct access to food to food insecure HHs, including through CfW and other means of cash support assistance when possible.

All implementation modalities should be adapted by adopting proper DO NO HARM approaches to preserve the health of both beneficiaries and aid workers. This calls for additional activities focused on awareness about how to reduce risks of contagion from the virus on still operating working places, as well as during delivery of assistance.

### **Constraints**

- Further and long-lasting restrictions and limitation imposed by local authorities due to worsening of the outbreak. So far the West Bank is practically under curfew until 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020.
- Already limited financial resources available to carry out currently planned response, compounded with limited additional financial resources to address additional required efforts.
- Difficulty in replenishing supplies in the market especially in the case of Gaza Strip.
- Reduction of aid workers ability to be operational due to COVID-19 illness or quarantine measures, as well as lack of information and awareness of the COVID-19, and how to provide humanitarian assistance in this context.