

Asian Farmers' Association (AFA) Intervention

**"COVID19 pandemic: a worldwide response from the global farmers' community.
Stories from the field"**

2020 High Level Political Forum (HLPF)

14 July 2020, 8pm Manila/ 2-3 pm CEST

Good evening from Philippines. Pleased to be with all of you today. I would like to share with you our AFA's initiatives in responding to COVID-19, and end with a recommendation.

In Asia Pacific, many of us, small scale family farmers, were harvesting our produce when COVID-19 came, but we cannot bring our products to the market, and the traders and buyers could not get to our farms. Offices, hotels and restaurants were closed so there were no demand for food supply in these otherwise ready markets. Some of us were forced to sell low, dump our produce or feed these to animals. In the cities however, food was scarce and more expensive, and less accessible. No markets, no buyers, no processing facilities, no storage facilities, meant no incomes for family farmers, when we should be earning during harvest time, to keep us afloat until the next harvest season and to have some capital for the planting season.

During COVID times, our member FOs have responded quickly .

- In Philippines, India, Laos, Bangladesh, Nepal, Vietnam, Awareness campaign about COVID-19 was done, with members creating communication channels among their leaders to share information about status of members and government support to farmers during COVID-19.
- Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Philippines, Vietnam and Myanmar FOs distributed food packs to needy families. In Myanmar AFFM, for example, distributed food packs to about 40 families who were locked down because one of the residents in the village had a virus. As it is a member of a trade union platform, some of their farmer groups started direct selling to affiliated trade unions.
- Lao FO LFN's organic cabbage growers group took to the internet to spread the news about their rotting cabbages, and soon, a local logistics company with the local government partnered with them to bring their cabbages to the capital.
- Indonesia FO started online delivery of organic rice to city consumers.
- India FO SEWA made 5 lakhs of face masks and distributed these for free to indigent farming families, while selling to local government officials and other local people. It also trained grassroots women on hand pump repairing to ensure supply of clean and potable water, procured some of the produce of the marginal farmers so they can have cash, and then processed these produce in their RUDI processing center, enabling other women workers to have work during COVID-19 times, and then distributed these RUDI food packs to food insecure families in Gujarat.
- FOs became extensionists and service delivery providers. Philippines and Bangladesh FOs got seeds from local agriculture centers, repacked these seeds for distribution to their members.

- In all 16 countries, family farmers continued to work in the farms and tend kitchen gardens and communal gardens. Nepal FO advocated to their government to allow farmers to go to their farms during lockdown so they can continue to produce food.
- A story I would like to highlight is the story of the all women start-up cooperative called KGAT, who belong to the Dumagat indigenous community. This cooperative is a member of 2 advocacy FOs, struggling against the construction of a mega dam that will flood their ancestral lands. The FOs have received rice, noodles and canned goods as COVID-19 relief. Their members had a bumper harvest, but nowhere to sell, or local traders were buying cheap. With national FO PAKISAMA facilitating market linkage, KGAT, partnered with a homeowners' association to use its covered basketball court for a week-end farmers market. For seven weeks in a row now, they have been selling about 40 varieties of fresh and affordable fruits, vegetables and root crops, including their non timber forest product – brooms and broomsticks. It partnered with a religious order – Dela Salle brothers- who bought 600 food packs, consisted of assorted vegetables to cook favorite local, nutritious dishes of “pakbet, sinigang and laing”. KGAT also gave 100 packs to their most vulnerable members who lost income from the community tourism business due to the lockdown. It also partnered with two online vegetable delivery shops catering to middle class families in Metro Manila. What has been the results so far? KGAT was happy to report that they were able to help a hundred FFPO members to increase by 25% on average the price of their products; lower by at least 5% the retail price of vegetable, rootcrops, and fruits sold to their consumers; and contribute to supplying more nutritious food packs to urban poor families. Its capital increased from \$250 to \$1,600, with net income of \$1,340 in a month-long operation. Most importantly, they felt that they were able to expand their contacts and broaden their partners with different sectors and increased solidarity among their own members and with consumers. Last week, KGAT partnered with the Department of Agriculture and three other small-scale enterprises in conducting a farmers' market in the biggest urban poor area in the Philippines.

In conclusion, to build back better, we call on governments and development partners to recognize family farmers through their organizations and cooperatives as solution providers, as frontliners and as dynamic and active partners for the work to implement the UN Decade of family farming to accelerate the achievement of SDG 1 and SDG2. We call for direct financing to Farmers organizations at global, regional and national levels so that we can upscale our work, strengthen our role in our common pursuit for a sustainable, resilient, just, inclusive food systems, the principles of which have been mentioned by previous speakers before me.

Thank you for your attention.