



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Strengthening food security and nutrition

in Caucasus and Central Asia countries



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Making operational the linkages between social protection, nutrition and agricultural interventions across the food systems



Effectively addressing the determinants of rural poverty requires taking a multi-sector approach. The project adopts a comprehensive approach to development by operationalizing the linkages between agriculture, food security, nutrition and social protection.

The project encompasses three major components:

Piloting policy options. Six pilot operations will provide evidence base of the impact of the integrated approach on development outcomes, with the results ultimately feeding into key policy, legislative and programming processes at the national, regional and global levels.

Coordination and advocacy. Aiming to foster political commitment and strategic policies, the project promotes policy dialogue and increased inter-ministerial support and collaboration with other partners towards a comprehensive approach on food security, nutrition, social protection and food systems.

Enabling environment. Providing guidance and know-how for improved policies, legislations and programs is at the core of the project. The aim is to identify gaps and opportunities for cross sector action and synergies to include food security, nutrition, social protection and sustainable agricultural actions, especially those resulting from the pilots into current policy, legislative and programming processes and ultimately to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The strategy behind the project is to build capacities between the global, regional and national levels for greater policy and implementation coherence of food security, nutrition efforts and social protection, using agriculture as the binding essence. The underlying principle of the project is to "Build Capacities to Strengthen Capacities".

Global

At the global level, the project brings the country level and regional experiences on the implementation to the international arena. The project interacts with global political processes leading to zero hunger to: provide policy-oriented norms, standards and guidance for a coherent approach on food security, nutrition and social protection linkages; enhance strategic and operational capacities for food security, nutrition and social protection; increase political commitment and engagement by providing advocacy, raising awareness and fostering knowledge sharing in an inclusive and transparent policy dialogue and organise global events in the sphere of food security, nutrition and social protection policies.





Regional

At the regional level, the project brings together best practices and instruments for capacity development, policy dialogue and learning about food security and nutrition strategies, including nutrition-sensitive social protection and school food and nutrition programs, from the 3 target countries (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) plus other countries in the region. This promotes the harmonization of approaches to food security, nutrition and social protection in the Eurasian region and policy coherence in the Member States of the Eurasian Economic Union.

National

In each of the focus countries, a different **"School Food and Nutrition Programme linked to the Agricultural Sector"** pilot is being implemented to enhance local diet quality and promote broader sustainable agricultural development. In Armenia, this involves the establishment of school gardens in three schools, and in Tajikistan, 22 school gardens are being set up. Kyrgyzstan is benefiting from the implementation of a sustainable centralized model for the supply of agricultural products; a total of 29 schools and other social institutions are supported by the services of the Logistics Centre.



The project is implementing two **"Strengthening Food Systems for Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection"** models, which provide beneficiaries with additional livelihood support for improved nutrition and rural development outcomes. The "Cash+" approach being implemented in Armenia and the "Productive Social Contract/Cash+" model being tested in Kyrgyzstan will link the countries' national social protection programmes that support households with children to small-scale, nutrition-sensitive agricultural innovations training and extension services and nutrition education.

In Tajikistan, one of the world's top remittance-receiving countries, the project implements the pilot **"Promoting Inclusive Economic Growth through Matching Grants for Families of Migrants"**, seeking to leverage the remittances of migrant workers by investing them in the development of family farming, targeting female household heads and returning labour migrants. Participants invest remittances (up to 50 percent of the funds) in a small-scale agricultural project and obtain the remaining 50 percent from project funds, while additionally benefiting from professional guidance by FAO.

School food and nutrition programmes linked to the agricultural sector



School food and nutrition programmes can be effective tools to reach nutritionally vulnerable populations, and have the potential to address the causes of hunger and malnutrition if designed in a comprehensive way. FAO specifically promotes the adoption of a food systems perspective on school feeding in order to achieve long-term gains in nutrition and broader rural development.

A key aspect of the Organization's strategy is to link local farmers with school food and nutrition programmes to boost the local economy and encourage community involvement. To ensure that locally produced school food meets the necessary quality standards and is provided to schoolchildren in adequate amounts, technical guidance is given to those involved in procurement and preparation. In addition, the voluntary adoption of healthy diets among schoolchildren is facilitated by making nutrition education part of the curriculum. By establishing school gardens, for instance, children learn how to grow healthy food while simultaneously learning about sustainable food cultivation. Finally, the Organization's strategy focuses on creating an enabling regulatory and institutional environment in order to allow for effective formulation and implementation of school food and nutrition programmes.

In order to address country-specific challenges, the "Developing Capacity for Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Selected Countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia" project implements three different "School Food and Nutrition Programmes linked to the Agricultural Sector" pilots in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In the three focus countries, FAO is working alongside Ministries of Agriculture, Education, Health, Social Affairs and Labour, the World Food Program WFP and the Social and Industrial Food Service Institute (SIFI). The pilots are part of the project's effort to reduce food insecurity and malnutrition, and break the cycle of rural poverty, by building synergies between agricultural and social protection policies. By providing an evidence base on the effectiveness of an integrated approach to development, these pilots help shape key policy and programming processes in the focus countries and beyond.

Armenia

In Armenia, the pilot is establishing school gardens (by the means of greenhouses with a total surface of more than 1 100 sq.m) in three schools. Schools manage the food production and use the greenhouses for educational process and vocational counselling for secondary school students. Target schools are under the National School Feeding program in Ararat Region (Ararat Marz).

Three different technical options are being tested:

- A small greenhouse (198 m²) that covers only the school requirements for additional food supply. This model is implemented in the Vedi basic school No.1 that has 626 students.
- A bigger greenhouse (384 m²) that covers the school requirements and allows the selling of surpluses (earnings will be used for the school infrastructure development). The Verin Artashat secondary school, operating this model, has a total of 457 students.
- The biggest greenhouse (528 m²) that produces food for the school itself, for neighboring schools and for selling surpluses in the local market. This model is operated by the Surenavan secondary school for 303 students.

The pilot aims to develop schoolyards, in collaboration with the local community, and build capacity of school staff and local farmers to produce, prepare and market locally produced and diverse agricultural products. Furthermore, schools and schoolyards are utilized for their potential to spread education and knowledge on sustainable agricultural practices and nutrition well-being.

This activity will support the Armenian National School Feeding Programme into reaching its full potential in supporting socially and nutritionally vulnerable children and their families by providing the Programme with evidence for a comprehensive and holistic approach to address food insecurity and malnutrition. The project is developing guidelines and training workshops for schools, farmers and households planning to produce vegetables in greenhouses. It will also enhance knowledge and capacity of school staff, schoolchildren, local farmers and government officials on sustainable agriculture and nutrition by using the school as a platform to promote education on sustainable agricultural practices and nutrition and; it will strengthen linkages between the School Feeding Programme, the local agriculture production and the local economy.

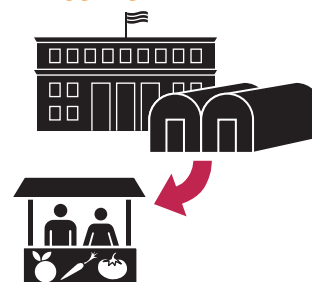


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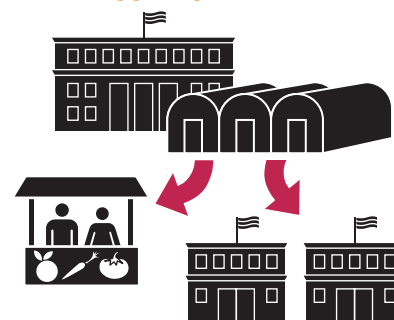
Small greenhouse



Bigger greenhouse



Biggest greenhouse



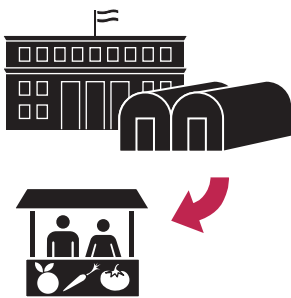
Tajikistan



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In Tajikistan, the project is establishing seedbeds for schools in the Vakhsh, Dusti districts and Nurek city. The aim of these school gardens is to increase food supplies and meet the nutritional needs of schoolchildren and their local communities and to obtain an additional source of financial resources for the school feeding.

Twenty schools of the districts of Vakhsh (10 schools); Dusti (9 schools) and Nurek (1 school) are being provided with 22 cold frames/seedbed greenhouses of 144 m² each equipped with drip irrigation system. Additionally the schools are supplied with agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, containers and tools. School staff and workers are trained in sustainable food production. The vegetables produced by the school gardens complement the food consumption and nutritional needs of schoolchildren (increasing the availability of diverse and nutritious school meals) and surpluses are sold in the local markets. Additionally, the school gardens are used for education on sustainable agricultural practices and nutritional well-being for the school children and the community. Some 3400 students of the selected primary schools enjoy an improved nutrition as a result of this innovation.



Seedbed production brings additional benefits to the schools and communities as it helps to conserve soil and water, increase production volumes during winter season and provides employment opportunities in the agricultural sector. Major horticultural crops currently grown in seedbeds include tomato and cucumber. The project is developing guidelines and training workshops for schools, farmers and households planning to produce vegetables in cold greenhouses.

It is widely acknowledged that having access and availability to diverse and nutritious food without appropriate nutrition knowledge and education often falls short of achieving long-term nutrition gains. School community gardens provide an appropriate platform for learning for schoolchildren including, learning how to grow food for a healthy diet, improving the soil, protecting the environment, marketing food for profit, enjoy garden food and, not least, advocating these practices to others. FAO will conduct capacity development workshops with technical experts, curriculum developers, teachers and other stakeholders, for integrating food and nutrition education into the national educational curriculum.

Kyrgyzstan

In Kyrgyzstan, the project is developing a sustainable centralized model for supplying agricultural products from small-scaled farmers to meet the needs of schools and other social institutions in the Kemin district. A total of 29 schools will benefit from the services of the Logistics Centre, and stronger links of local food producers with the School food and nutrition programme will foster local economic development.

The Logistic Center is a key element of the centralized model of procurement and supply of food for schools. It allows the collection and sustained distribution of fruits, vegetables, eggs and fish as it has all the necessary equipment: a cooling storage of 270 m²; transportation means and a laboratory for food safety and quality control/certification.

The Logistic Center will foster food production by local farmers, providing them with a sales market on the one hand, and assist schools in purchasing quality and diverse local products for school feeding on the other hand. This model for food supply for the schools is very efficient due the economies of scale: allows purchases from numerous small producers and suppliers of agricultural products; purchases products in large quantities at more favorable prices; reduces transportation costs and; quality control and monitoring are conducted in a single location.

In addition, the Logistic Centre fulfils the following functions:

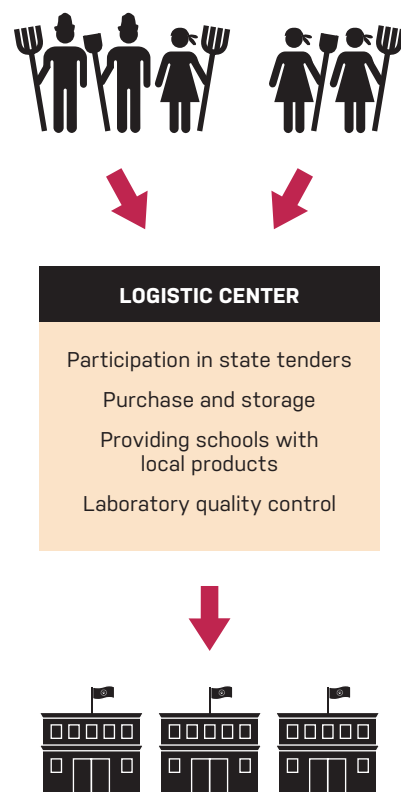
- i) Participates in state tenders for the supply of products to schools;
- ii) Provides schools with local products;
- iii) Purchases and storage of products of local farmers and
- iv) Provides laboratory facilities for quality control of the food products.

The Logistic Center will benefit schoolchildren of 29 schools from years 1 to 4 in Kemin district, Chui oblast. It is estimated that this intervention will cover between 10 000 to 12 000 students of primary school and approximately 50 small scale local producers.

Due to existing and planned volumes, prices and quality control in particular, the Logistic Center can be competitive in the state tenders for the supply of food products to schools. It will act as a link between local agricultural producers and schools. This interaction will contribute to development of the economy in the district and a more active involvement of the public in development of the school food and nutrition programs.



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Strengthening food systems for nutrition-sensitive social protection: Cash+



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FAO's supported evidence has shown that the poor, excluded and vulnerable can also contribute to local and national economic growth, if provided with the adequate means and opportunities. Social protection can open these opportunities. Access to predictable, regular and sizable social assistance programs (such as cash transfers) can enhance food security, enable access to health and education — as well as generate **productive and economic impacts**, promoting investment in agriculture activities, purchase of agriculture inputs, and moving from wage labor to on-farm enterprises.

However, FAO also recognizes that even though social protection generates important social and economic impacts; it will not be able to sustainably move people out of poverty by itself. There is a need for an *integrated approach* (Social protection PLUS).

Social protection or Cash+ (plus) interventions seek to boost the livelihoods and productive capacities of vulnerable households through the provision of a flexible combination of cash transfers with productive activities, inputs, assets and/or training and extension services.

Kyrgyzstan

The Government of Kyrgyzstan has requested FAO's support in designing and implementing an alternative social contract pilot, to provide beneficiaries of the **Monthly Benefit for Low Income Families with Children (MBLIF)** with packages of interventions to support their pathways out of poverty.

FAO proposes to complement the *existing and currently active* cash benefits provided by the Government of Kyrgyzstan under the MBLIF scheme with a menu of options for potential productive interventions (based on opportunities in the selected regions and analysis of existing value chains). These options will include nutrition-sensitive and/or climate-smart agriculture interventions. The three options are focused on: i) kitchen gardens to improve households' nutrition (dietary diversity) and self-sufficiency; ii) small package to boost household nutrition (dietary diversity); and iii) promotion of income generating opportunities for households. Depending on the option chosen, beneficiaries will receive a package that will include seeds to be planted in early spring for open ground options, and early spring and late autumn for the protected ground option. The households will also receive organic fertilizers to improve the yields and contribute to climate-smart

agricultural practices. Households that have selected a protected ground option will also receive mobile tunnel greenhouses (123).

All pilot beneficiaries will receive agronomic training, technological training and nutrition education. Beneficiaries will also benefit from close follow up from Ayil Okmotu social issues specialists and village authorities.

FAO will support the generation of evidence on the processes and benefits of the Cash+ approach in Kyrgyzstan to inform the scale up of the Cash+ model.

Armenia

The Government of Armenia is reconsidering its approach to promote productive inclusion of the most vulnerable groups. In this context, the Employment Agency of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is restructuring its current programs to allow for a wider sector engagement in contributing to poverty alleviation. FAO is supporting the Government of Armenia in developing a vision on the pathways out of poverty for recipients of family benefits in rural areas, which includes a gradual and sustainable approach to support productive inclusion and improvement of food security and nutrition.

By bringing together the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture, the project is fostering a dialogue to jointly design and implement a pilot that integrates social protection with nutrition-sensitive agriculture for rural household beneficiaries. The process itself is building cross sectoral linkages and contributing to a framework for future joint interventions.

The Cash+ pilot proposes to complement the existing and currently active cash benefits provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs under the Family Benefit scheme with a menu of options of productive interventions, including provision of inputs such as seedlings and poultry, as well as assets and trainings, based on the household's livelihood profile and opportunities in the selected region. In addition, these options will be accompanied by a range of nutrition-sensitive interventions, such as food, nutrition and agricultural education.

This pilot will support the Government of Armenia to define its productive inclusion strategy for the rural poor.



Promoting inclusive economic growth through matching grants for agriculture and agribusiness in the Republic of Tajikistan



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Tajikistan is one of the largest sources of labour migration in the region, as well as one of the largest recipients of remittances, mainly from the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. Depending on the year, personal remittances received (as % of GDP) can vary from 20 to 40 percent, or even higher as remittances can be sent home through informal channels like mediators, friends or family members. This could be an enormous source of investment in the country, but, unfortunately, the development potential of remittances in the agro-rural sector is hardly exploited. In fact, the vast majority of remittance flows (up to 90 percent) at destination are spent on primary needs (food consumption, housing, education, etc.) while a much smaller part goes to savings and investments in rural areas. Channeling remittances into agriculture, which is the second-largest sector of the country's economy but which has been suffering from low productivity, would have catalytic effects on rural development by promoting food security and nutrition, employment creation, and inclusive growth.

Migrant networks and return migrants can foster the transfer of skills, know-how, and technology, as well as investments that promote agricultural and rural development, including employment opportunities in the rural areas of origin. The remittances they generate can be mobilized in a catalytic manner to harness the developmental potential of migration, especially in terms of food security and poverty reduction, through agricultural development. The mobilization of remittances will therefore have multiplier effects on inclusive growth, food security and nutrition and employment creation resulting in a more productive agricultural sector; diversification into manufacturing, value addition and services; and the promotion of decent work and employment in agribusiness.

This pilot aims to mobilize human and financial resources of migrant workers and their families with the purpose of contributing to the development of agriculture and sustainable development of Tajikistan in general.

Through this pilot, FAO assists migrants and their families and communities in formulating small- and medium-scale projects in fruits, vegetables and livestock production and agribusiness. The project will use the "1+1 approach": for every dollar invested by the migrant worker from remittances, an additional dollar is made available from project

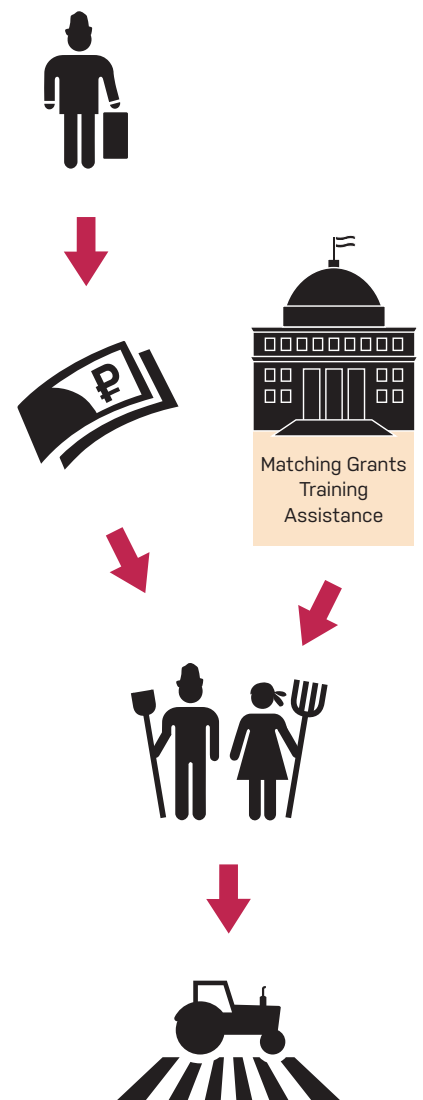
funds. Furthermore, capacity development programmes will enable migrant families to build skills in small- and medium business development in the agricultural sector.

The project publicize the opportunity to participate in the community. Those interested submit a brief investment proposal, which is pre-screened by FAO and the Government of Tajikistan. To be eligible for participation in the pilot programme, applicants should be migrants or returnees, women with household responsibilities receiving remittances from a first degree relative, or forced returnees with proven ineligibility to migrate abroad. The inclusion of returnees and forced returnees is vital, as migrants are increasingly returning to their home country, and their sustainable reintegration into society requires creation and broadening of employment opportunities.

The applicants receive support from specialists to further develop eligible ideas into business plans. An Oversight Committee evaluates the final applications and assign the grants, which are delivered in cash – specifically, through an ATM card. In addition to financial support, the pilot includes capacity development programmes, which allow beneficiaries to build skills in small- and medium business development in the agricultural sector. The programmes cover technical areas related to the specific sub-sector and value chain segment, such as production, processing and marketing, and crosscutting themes, including business skills and enterprise development.

FAO monitors the grants performance and compiles a final technical report highlighting achievements, challenges, and recommendations to be considered by the Government in scaling up the pilot.

The pilot is being implemented in the Hissor and Jaloliddin Balkhii districts in Tajikistan in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Population; the Ministry of Agriculture; the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and Finance; the International Organization for Migration and the National Farmers' Association.





Russian Federation Funding

FAO-Russian cooperation comprises support to a wide array of development initiatives in the region and around the world as well as FAO assistance within the Russian Federation. FAO's Project "Developing Capacity for Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Selected Countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia" (funded by the Russian Federation), is timely to strategically mediate the challenges in the region and promote cross-sectoral collaboration by providing adequate capacity to effectively pursue and manage coherence between agriculture, nutrition, health, education and social protection sectors.