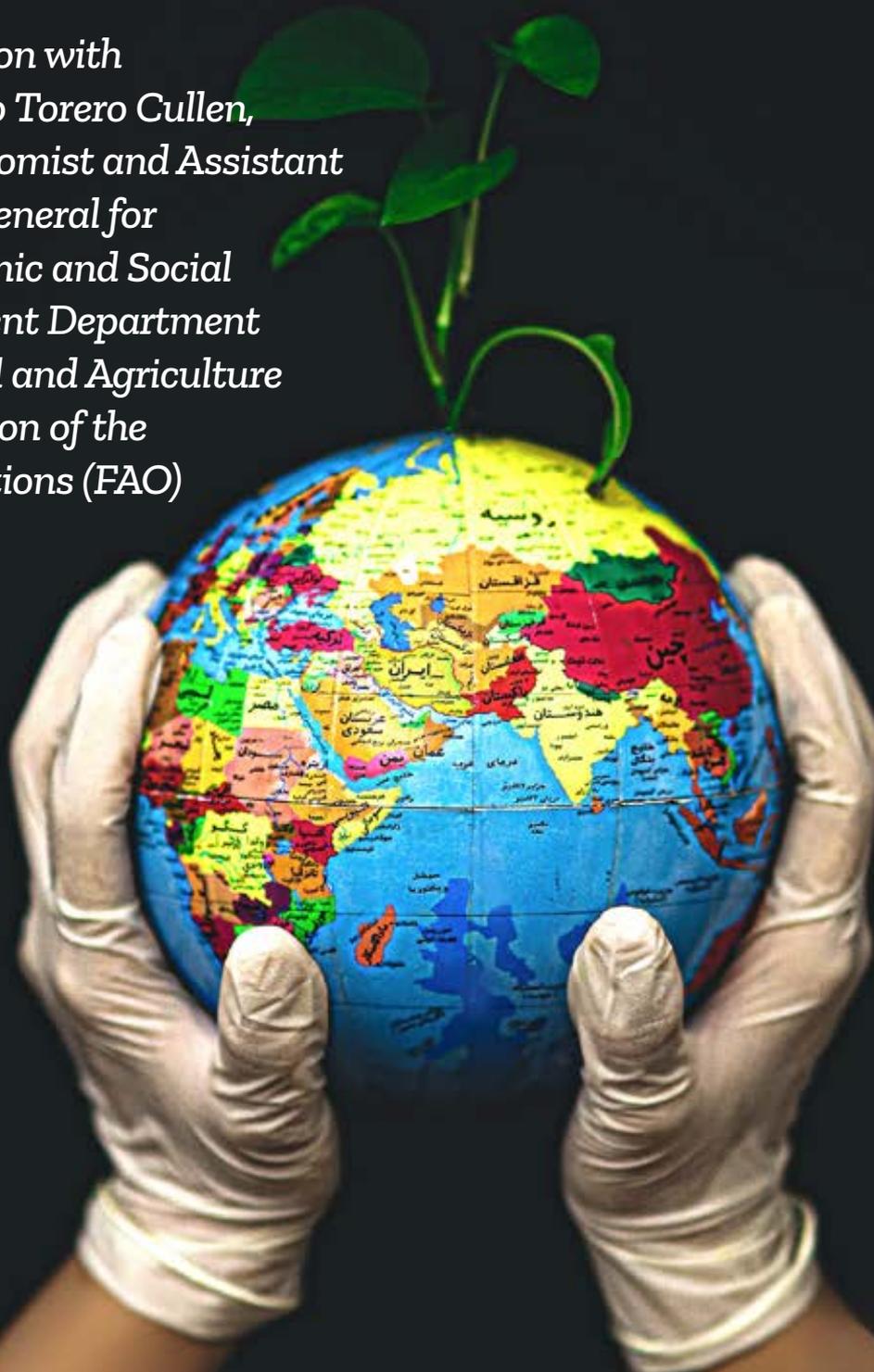


WFO Talks to Dr Maximo Torero Cullen

*Q&A Session with
Dr Maximo Torero Cullen,
Chief Economist and Assistant
Director-General for
the Economic and Social
Development Department
at the Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations (FAO)*



Dr Máximo Torero Cullen is the Chief Economist/Assistant Director-General, Economic and Social Development Department (ES) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) since January 2019. Prior to joining FAO, he was the World Bank Group Executive Director for Argentina, Bolivia, Chile Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay since November 2016 and before the Bank Dr Torero led the Division of the Markets, Trade, and Institutions at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). His major research work lies mostly in analyzing poverty, inequality, importance of geography and assets (private or public) in explaining poverty, and in policies oriented towards poverty alleviation based on the role played by infrastructure, institutions, and on how technological breakthroughs (or discontinuities) can improve the welfare of households and small farmers. His experience encompasses Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia.



As FAO Chief Economist, could you please give us an overview of the long and short-term impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on food supply chains? What are the most important effects you foresee in the short and long-run?

FAO is most concerned is about people's access to food in the medium and long run.

The significant slowdown of all economies of the world and especially of the most vulnerable ones will make countries – especially countries in food crises, dependent on primary commodity exports, and food import-dependent countries – struggle to have the needed resources to buy food.

Health and Food go together. The only way to keep alive the food value chains is by assuring health protocols are in place across food value chains. If not, we will move from lockdowns by decree to lock downs because of health reasons.

*There is a serious concern that producers might not be able to plant this year, or not plant enough, as normally. **If we do not help producers to plant this year, this will translate into a lack of food later this year and in 2021.***

Up to now we have been successful in avoiding protectionary measures and trade is flowing normally. We need to ensure this continues.

COVID-19 has upended lives and livelihoods across the planet, wiping most of the achievements and the road we have travelled up to here to deliver the Agenda 2030 promise. What are FAO's priorities to transform the food systems coping with emergencies like COVID-19, while also accelerating the progress of SDG2 and assuring at the same time the food systems are more climate-smart, resilient and biodiversity-friendly?

FAO has been advocating for countries to: keep international trade open; increase intra-regional trade; scale up social protection programmes; keep agricultural supply chains alive; maintain agricultural activities – to avoid the health crisis turn into a food crisis.

*So that countries can take informed decisions and lessen COVID-19's impacts, FAO has been providing latest information on food value chains, markets and food prices, and putting forward **analysis and solutions**.*

*We have also **stepped up our work** in food crisis contexts where COVID-19's impact could be devastating.*



“ If we do not help producers to plant this year, this will translate into a lack of food later. ”

FAO is also helping countries to rebuild better.

For example, in Pacific SIDS, FAO will continue to strengthen food systems and make them more nutrition-sensitive and disaster-resilient, be that through boosting local food production, or scaling up climate-smart activities. FAO continues to provide access to quality data – the need for this emerged strongly during COVID-19.

FAO, The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, and The Johns Hopkins Alliance recently launched a [food dashboard](#), with data on the food systems of over 230 countries & territories. Just some examples as FAO and partners continue to strive to create sustainable, biodiversity-friendly food systems.

The world farmers are standing strong in the middle of the COVID-19 storm: they are not stopping and are keeping up their role of feeding the world, ensuring that their fellow citizens can have access to fresh, nutritious and healthy food. What actions is FAO putting in place to support the world farmers in this endeavour, in terms of assistance to governments?

To support farmers and their organisations in the coming months, FAO has been urging countries to allow movement of seasonal workers and transport operators across domestic and international borders whilst respecting health protocols; and putting forward good practices such as: identifying collection centres closer to producers; allowing local markets to remain open, while putting in place strict physical distancing measures;

if feasible, relocate markets to larger premises, while ensuring quality and food safety.

The Decade on Family Farming was launched one year ago with a clear action plan that promotes the priorities of youth, women, and men in the rural sector. In the current situation of crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, strengthening family farming is more than ever a key element. Which would be according to your vision a concrete intervention for strengthening family farming during the current emergency and beyond? And how would you revise the UNDF action plan to allow the emergency response?

Family farming includes large, medium and small holders. Our priority is to support medium and small holders and micro and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which are part of their value chains. Small holders and MSMEs are the most cash constraint today and where technical support is needed. Access to credit or soft loans assures that small businesses stay open.

We also need to create new market opportunities. Accelerating intra-regional trade can create a new demand for food. This needs political commitment and investment to ramp up access to infrastructure and improve food safety. Improving food safety across the value chain can reduce nontariff trade barriers. This is central to promoting regional trade. Africa, for example, could hugely benefit from removal of nontariff barriers. The African Continental Free Trade Agreement is key to this.