

# Guidelines to Soil Fertility and Fertilizers partners in the context of COVID-19



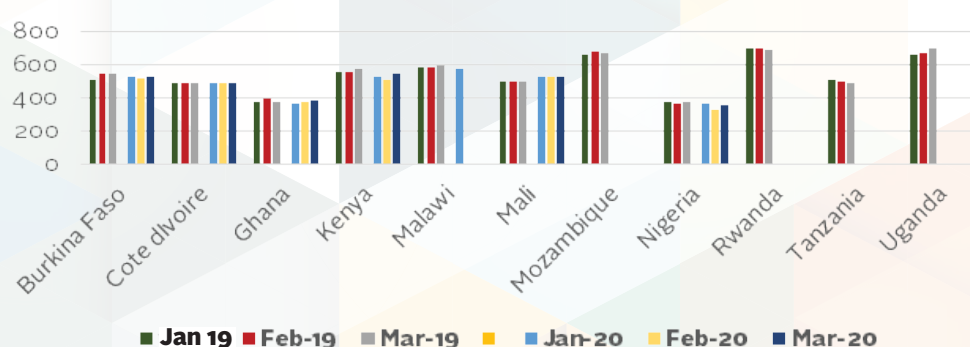
To increase small holder farmers (SHFs) income and food security, part of AGRA's investments aim at increasing quality and appropriate fertilizer use in the 11 focus countries, while ensuring soil health and farmers' resilience. The strategy is to work with both the public and private sectors to see this happen.

1. Support is given to research Institutions to develop recommendations for fertilizer blends. Then Governments are supported to improve the subsidy program by using appropriately balanced fertilizer blends among other things to allow the return on investments. Quality control is also required from Governments.
2. The private sector is involved in the research for blends development to facilitate the production and commercialization of the best-fit blends.
3. Linkages with the distribution networks and farmers are developed to facilitate the supply on one side and with extension services for demand creation.
4. Overall, access and use of fertilizers are facilitated for smallholder farmers through linkages with suppliers and the development of the last mile delivery system.

## 1. Status of the fertilizer systems in the pandemic context

- Fertilizers are officially recognized as essential goods and not restricted from movement:** in all the AGRA focus intervention countries, fertilizers as all agro-inputs are allowed to move despite general restrictions. This was possible (in Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria for example) in part due to the advocacy efforts from the private sector (International Fertilizer Association and West Africa Fertilizer Association) and the Organizations like AGRA, IFDC, AFAP, and the AfDB and their partners. Governments have taken measures to make fertilizers and other inputs available to SHFs through available mechanisms like Planting for Food and Jobs in Ghana, Subsidy Program in Burkina Faso, while others are implementing new mechanisms like in Ethiopia or Kenya.
- Availability of fertilizers:** In East and Southern Africa, stocks are in place as the season has started earlier and, in some countries, it is the harvesting period. In West Africa, the planting season is about to start in Nigeria and Ghana while in Sahelian countries, the season will start end of May-June 2020. In these countries, it is important to have stocks available. In its recent update, WAFA and IFDC indicated that the level of stocks in this region to be around 80% of the needs. This season it seems that the main challenge will not be the availability but rather how the movement/distribution of fertilizer will be handled.
- Logistics challenges:** Even though fertilizers are not restricted from movement, we still see continued delays in delivering the fertilizers from the port to the countries and from an area to another one in a country. This is due to the curfews in many countries and the required authorization to move. This is going to negatively impact the availability of the commodity and raise prices as transportation, distribution and logistics become an issue for distributors and the agro-dealers. In some countries like Uganda, agro-dealers have to use tricycles to deliver fertilizers to farmers who cannot move. In Rwanda, an innovative way is found which uses ICT to aggregate farmers' needs and link them with agro-dealers.
- Impact on the production:** At the international level, the fertilizer production is not much affected as many plants even in Italy or France continued the production. However, production has slowed down in China and India in March. In Sub-Saharan Africa, there are now many fertilizer plants including blending plants which could meet the demand. These among others include OCP, Indorama, Dangote, Toguna, MEA, OMNIA, Yara or CIAT/CIPAM with production capacities that are enough to supply the demand as the main raw materials are available in the continent. However, next season could be more affected if the pandemic is taking longer to stop.
- Impact on prices:** Due to these challenges, logistics, and increase in transportation cost, fertilizer prices may raise in countries entering the planting season. However, from Africa Fertilizer data, prices have shown slightly higher figures from January to March 2019 compared to the same period of 2020 in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Kenya, while it is the opposite in Cote d'Ivoire and Mali. The increase may be noticed from April as many countries closed their borders and locked down some cities after mid-March 2020.

**Urea price in January-March 2019 and January-March 2020**



Source: Africafertilizer.org

The same trend is observed for the NPK in west Africa where the data are available.

- **Impact on the use:** the current average use of fertilizers in SSA is 17 kg/ha and the outlook was showing an increase. However, due to the prices, challenges on logistics, the use could be stagnant or even decrease. Even if The Government subsidies are in place, the volume could not be sufficient and farmers' targeting remains a challenge.

## 2. Integrated actions

To better prepare and get a good planting season, many activities have to be implemented which involve several stakeholders:

- Input need assessment from farmers and farmers' organizations
- Validation of the input needs
- Mobilization of input suppliers and linking them with farmers and their organizations
- Linking input suppliers and farmers with off-takers and financial institutions
- Monitoring the delivery of inputs
- Monitoring the use of the inputs and GAP by smallholder farmers
- Monitoring the mechanism with off-takers



In this critical context, integrated actions will be needed to facilitate access to input in general and fertilizers in particular.

1. Engage with the private sector to closely monitor the availability of the fertilizers (producers, importers, agro-dealers, Governments for the subsidies) and the prices.
2. Joint monitoring of the system with other organizations and advocacy with decision-makers for accessibility and affordability of fertilizers at the regional and national levels.
3. Development and implementation of input credit mechanism at the country level: such mechanism will be important to make fertilizers available for smallholder farmers who will not have the financial capacity. However, as highlighted in Burkina Faso, these mechanisms could also be impacted by the pandemic due to the slowed movement and logistics issue for grain. In this case, engage with the Ministries of Agriculture, Ministries of Trade and processors/off-takers.
4. Link AGRA's investments with Government initiatives (loans, subsidy programs)
5. Credit guarantee for supply chain stakeholders, especially agro-dealers to purchase small transportation equipment.
6. Innovative ways of reaching farmers, using ICT platforms to respect physical distancing measures and avoid any contact.
7. Advocating for Government to reinforce quality control to avoid fake fertilizers getting in the hands of smallholder farmers.
8. Promoting fertilizer blends which are likely to provide more return on investments. Also, as it has been proven that there is a direct correlation between micronutrient deficiencies in soils and plants and micronutrient deficiencies in humans, developing fertilizers blends with micronutrients could help at the same time to improve food security, human health, and resilience.
9. Promoting organic fertilizer as part of soil fertility management.
10. Ensure stakeholders strictly follow the measures set up by the Government
11. Ensure extension and capacity building guidelines are applied.

**THANKS FOR YOUR WORK AND STAY SAFE.**