

Fertilizer Alert

#01 July 2020

Fertilizer alerts identify current challenges and outline urgent action needed in the fertilizer sector in Ethiopia, based on surveys and focus group discussions

Ethiopia

Alert 1

Mobility restrictions and fear of infection limit the import and national distribution of fertilizers

Alert 2

Mobility restrictions hamper the last-mile delivery of fertilizers to unions and cooperatives

Alert 3

Mobility restrictions and social-distancing measures hinder farmers from purchasing fertilizers at unions and cooperatives

Alert 4

Mobility restrictions and social-distancing measures affect interactions between extensionists and farmers

Alert 1

Mobility restrictions and fear of infection limit the import and national distribution of fertilizers

What is the impact?

- The COVID-19 crisis affects the timely delivery of fertilizer bags from India to the port of Djibouti, which slows down fertilizer supply in Ethiopia
- The cross-border transport of fertilizer has been impacted to a limited extent (see Fertilizer watch, page 8)
- The transport of fertilizer from the port of Djibouti to 106 central stores has been affected (according to the majority of survey respondents; see Alert dashboard, page 7)
- The risk of contracting COVID-19 has created fear among labourers working at the port and warehouses in Djibouti, and in central stores
- Truck drivers are unwilling to engage in the transport of fertilizer as they are afraid of contracting COVID-19; 100-120 trucks were available for deliveries per day in mid-June, which is well below the daily 250 trucks required to deliver fertilizer to central stores across the country
- The cost of transporting fertilizer has doubled
- Labour associations have demanded work be halted in several occasions; labourers who continue to work have tripled their fee for unloading goods
- The process of offloading trucks takes much longer (2-3 days), which further slows down supply and increases costs
- Some central stores have been closed temporarily due to fears of spreading COVID-19
- Central stores are unable to rent additional storage facilities as private owners are also concerned about the further spread of the virus
- Those involved in loading and unloading trucks are afraid to meet drivers as their health status is unclear and they travel from cities where the rate of COVID-19 infection is rising

What actions are required?

- Promote and support the establishment of multi-stakeholder task forces, at federal and regional levels, to address challenges in the transport and distribution of fertilizer; ensure that these task forces include the health sector
- Support the task forces in the development and implementation of COVID-19 crisis response strategies that address emerging challenges in the supply and transport of fertilizer; the strategies should include an operational plan, actions required for resource mobilization, the sharing of responsibilities, and mechanisms for strengthening integration and collaboration
- Raise awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic and enforce required social-distancing and hygiene regulations among stakeholders and labourers involved in the distribution and transport of fertilizers
- Create awareness among central store and union workers and enhance their understanding of their responsibilities in relation to operating and working safely
- Ensure that workers across the entire fertilizer supply chain are provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) and hygiene products
- Urge the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and regional Bureaus of Agriculture (BoAs) to closely monitor, review, update and amend the fertilizer supply and distribution schedule, in this continuously changing situation
- Prioritize the supply and distribution of fertilizer according to the agro-ecologies and cropping calendars of different areas and crops
- Foster the partial shipment of fertilizer bags from India to Djibouti, rather than waiting for shipments to reach capacity
- Increase the number of trucks that travel to Djibouti to transport fertilizers
- Provide the resources and instructions for disinfecting trucks upon arrival and before unloading
- Establish a mechanism to replace and change truck drivers responsible for driving to and from Djibouti, with those driving in and out of Addis Ababa
- Set up testing stations with the authorities to conduct COVID-19 screening and provide resources for truck drivers to go into self-quarantine
- Identify and contract large transport companies for the transportation of fertilizer from the port of entrance to regions and woredas, avoiding frequent movements of small vehicles

What stakeholders are involved?

- MoA – inputs and marketing sector
- BoAs
- Ministry of Transport
- Regional Health Bureaus
- Ethiopian Agricultural Business Cooperation
- Cooperative agencies
- Ethiopia Logistic Cooperation

Who takes initiative? Who drives action?

- The project on capacity building for scaling up of evidence-based best practices for increased agricultural production in Ethiopia (CASCAPE) is expected to provide details on the situation of the fertilizer sector to the State Minister of Agricultural Input and Output Marketing Sector, and the Input Director of the MoA, and ask them to address the challenges
- The Input Director of the MoA facilitates the establishment of a multi-stakeholder task force at various levels to prepare responsive adaptation strategies including an operational plan and actions for resource mobilization
- Steering and technical committees mobilize resources from government, development partners and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide PPE and hygiene products across the whole supply chain
- Regional Health Bureaus create awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic and provide support to those engaged in the transport and distribution of fertilizer

Alert 2

Mobility restrictions hamper the last-mile delivery of fertilizers to unions and cooperatives

What is the impact?

- Mobility restrictions limit the supply of fertilizers to distribution centres and subsequently affect the availability of fertilizer for purchase at 3,500 unions and cooperatives (see dashboard, page 7)
- Mobility restrictions and social distancing hamper the distribution of fertilizer through cooperative stores at kebele level
- Social-distancing measures affect the day-to-day activities of workers at distribution centres, unions and cooperatives; survey respondents indicated that the measures have a negative impact (see dashboard, page 7)
- The price for loading and unloading fertilizer has increased significantly
- Moreover, survey respondents indicated that mobility restrictions have led to a decrease in the number of trucks travelling from regions to distribution centres, unions and cooperatives
- Participants in focus group discussions (FGDs) and experts indicated that the cost of renting trucks for the transportation of fertilizer to woredas and farmers has increased up to tenfold
- Reductions in the availability and distribution of fuel, particularly in Tigray, affect fertilizer distribution
- In Tigray state, the regional government determines the price of fertilizer, which causes fertilizer supply to become a loss-making operation for cooperatives and unions as they cannot recover the increased cost of transportation, which subsequently puts their business at risk of bankruptcy
- In other states - including Amhara; Oromia; and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) - the regional governments do not fix the price of fertilizer; cooperatives can recover their increased costs by raising the price of fertilizer to be paid by farmers, subsequently reducing affordability for and use by farmers
- Cooperatives need to cover the extra transport and storage costs, which ultimately increases the price of fertilizer for farmers (in all regions except for Tigray)

What actions are required?

- Create awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic among transport workers and stakeholders involved in the last-mile delivery of fertilizers
- Provide PPE and hygiene products to workers at distribution centres, unions and cooperatives
- Ensure compliance with government regulations on social-distancing and hygiene measures among workers at distribution centres, unions and cooperatives
- Support an increase in the number of trucks contracted for the transportation of fertilizers from distribution centres to unions and cooperatives
- Urge unions and cooperatives to disinfect fertilizer already in storage
- Encourage the BoA in Tigray to provide financial support to cooperatives, compensating them for their losses or subsidizing fertilizer transport

What stakeholders are involved?

- MoA and Regional BoAs
- Regional Bureau of Transport; Regional Health Bureaus
- Cooperative agencies
- Unions and cooperatives
- Transport companies

Who takes initiative? Who drives action?

- Cooperative agencies and unions mobilize resources from government and development organizations to purchase PPE and hygiene production
- Regional Health Bureaus create awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic among fertilizer stakeholders, workers and farmers
- Cooperative agencies disburse additional resources to contract trucks for transporting fertilizer to unions and cooperatives

Alert 3

Mobility restrictions and social-distancing measures hinder farmers from purchasing fertilizers at unions and cooperatives

What is the impact?

- The participants of both the survey and FGDs highlighted the fact that due to the limited availability of transport and fears of contracting the virus during their travels, farmers are restricted to traveling to cooperatives to purchase fertilizer
- The quantity of fertilizer that will be used by farmers over the coming season, as estimated during FGDs, is likely to be reduced
- Moreover, an increase in the price of fertilizer will affect its sale and use
- Participants in FGDs indicated that because of delays in fertilizer supply farmers have shifted fertilizer application from maize to late-season crops; for example, to teff in Western-Oromia
- Restrictions on the number of people who can meet in groups affect the operation of development groups; this limits their involvement in the distribution of fertilizer to farmers
- Participants in FGDs revealed that the restrictions hamper the use of the voucher system for purchasing fertilizers, as the system requires at least 20 farmers to register for voucher on the same form

What actions are required?

- Create awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic and enforce required social-distancing and hygiene regulations among staff and workers at cooperatives and customers
- Develop a strategy to distribute and supply fertilizer at locations that are accessible to farmers
- Support cooperatives in the set-up of fertilizer distribution schemes, which allow orders to be prepared and specific time slots to be allocated to farmers; this prevents mass mobilization in fertilizer distribution and sales
- Increase the working hours of workers at cooperatives (e.g. 12hrs, 7 days a week) to create a wider window for farmer customers to visit the centre
- Promote the sale of vouchers for fertilizer purchase at kebele level and reduce the number of farmers required for the system to operate
- Encourage the use of financial incentives for staff involved in fertilizer supply because of the increased risks they face in performing their duties at the time of the pandemic

What stakeholders are involved?

- Offices of Agriculture at both woreda and kebele levels
- Kebele Administration
- Health extension
- Cooperatives
- Development groups

Who takes initiative? Who drives action?

- BoAs arrange a campaign for Kebele Administration to raise awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic, through Kebele Offices of Agriculture, health extension workers and cooperatives, and enforce required social-distancing and hygiene regulations in the distribution of fertilizer
- Cooperatives, Kebele Offices of Agriculture and development groups prepare fertilizer distribution schedules for farmers
- BoAs, in collaboration with Kebele Offices of Agriculture, explore and subsequently roll out ways to reduce the number of farmers required to register together on one form within the voucher system, and create and implement financial incentives for transport workers and staff involved in the supply of fertilizer during the COVID-19 crisis

Alert 4

Mobility restrictions and social-distancing measures affect interactions between extensionists and farmers

What is the impact?

- Mobility restrictions and social-distancing measures affect the capacity of extensionists to conduct their work promoting the use of good agronomic practices, including fertilizers; survey respondents indicated that such measures have a negative impact (see dashboard, page 7)
- Extension officers are hindered from gathering information for fertilizer demand forecasting and from providing advice about fertilizers to farmers
- Social-distancing measures prevent extension officers from conducting or organizing fertilizer demonstrations and field days; they cannot organize farmer training events, and if they are able to set up demonstrations, the measures limit the number farmers allowed to visit them
- During the FGDs, experts indicated that the budget allocated to fertilizer demonstrations has been reassigned to COVID-19 responses
- Because of uncertainty and limited knowledge about the pandemic, experts have noticed that farmers are reluctant to interact with extensionists during field supervision
- The social-distancing measures impede group and peer learning among farmers, which prevents extension officers from achieving scale
- During FGDs, participants indicated that the cluster approach, in which farmers share and exchange labour, information and knowledge, is not feasible as long as social-distancing and mobility restrictions are in place

What actions are required?

- Create awareness among extension officers about the COVID-19 pandemic and enforce required social-distancing and hygiene regulations
- Provide extension officers with PPE and hygiene products
- Design and promote the use of alternative extension modalities, including supportive extension training and communication materials, and organize demonstrations and field days involving a limited number of participants
- Develop and provide guidelines to arrange training events with a limited number of participants, which are in line with COVID-19 social-distancing measures
- Promote the use of information and communications technology (ICT) such as television, radio, and interactive voice response platforms to disseminate information; prepare and distribute guidelines for the use of ICT in extension



Fertilizer storage at Central Store in Amhara (Photo: Zewidu Seime)

What actions are required?

- Purchase airtime on television and radio to disseminate agricultural information
- Invest in the purchase and distribution of tablets among development agents located at kebele level so that they can reach farmers through web- and mobile-based extension practices
- Promote the use of megaphones by extension officers to disseminate information among farmers
- Design, distribute and promote the use of posters, brochures and other printed communication materials
- Address aspects of COVID-19 measures and ways to adapt extension work and farm work during the training of extension agents
- Engage with various levels of government to regularly review mobility and social-distancing measures, and request them to be specific about the impact of these measures on extension work, such as the number and quota of employees allowed in the office, restrictions on farm visits, and the number of farmers participating in events

What stakeholders are involved?

- MoA and Ministry of Health
- BoAs and Regional Health Bureaus

**Who takes initiative?
Who drives action?**

- The CASCAPE project provides details on the current situation in the fertilizer sector to the extension officers and input directors of the MoA, asking them to address the challenges identified
 - Extension directorates of the MoA prepare and distribute extension training and communication materials
 - Extension directorates of the MoA mobilize resources from government, development partners and NGOs to provide PPE and hygiene products for extension personnel
 - Staff and partners of the CASCAPE projects participate in the preparation of guidelines on the use of ICT in extension
 - Regional Health Bureaus create awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic
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Fertilizer inspection at Enderta blend factory in Mekelle (Photo: Eric Smaling)

Dashboard

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on operations and services of the fertilizer sector

- Severe negative impact
- Negative impact
- Slight negative impact
- No impact; business as usual

Details

June | Alerts

Multilocational fertilizer trials on station	■	
Fertilizer trials in farmers' fields with different soil types	■	
Soil laboratory testing	■	
Quality inspection at the port of Djibouti	■	
Laboratory testing for fertilizer quality	■	
Stakeholder access to financial services for fertilizer distribution	■	
Farmers' access to credit and financial services for fertilizer purchase	■	
Shipment delivery at the port of Djibouti	■	
Delivery of fertilizer bags in Djibouti	■	
Import of fertilizer from the port of Djibouti and transport to regional distribution centres	■	
Transport from regional distribution centres to unions and cooperatives	■	Alert 2
Willingness of truck drivers to transport fertilizer	■	Alert 1
Packaging facilities of cooperatives and unions	■	
Day-to-day activities of distribution centres, unions and cooperatives	■	Alert 2, 3
Farmers' access to fertilizer at unions and cooperatives	■	Alert 3
Distribution of fertilizer to farmers at cooperative stores at kebele level	■	Alert 2
Mobility of farmers to and from unions and cooperatives	■	Alert 3
Organization of fertilizer demos and field days	■	Alert 4
Provision of advice on fertilizer use to farmers by extension officers	■	Alert 4
Price of fertilizer	■	
Sales of fertilizer	■	
Farmers' availability of cash to invest in purchasing fertilizer	■	
Farmers' willingness to pay for fertilizer	■	
Fertilizer demand forecasting	■	
Information sharing, coordination of activities, and alignment of existing strategies among fertilizer sector stakeholders	■	
Government's COVID-19 measures on mobility of fertilizer sector stakeholders	■	All Alerts
Quantity of fertilizer likely to be used July onwards	■	Outcome
Quantity and quality of crop produce to be harvested in the coming period	■	Outcome
Food and income security July onwards	■	Outcome

Dashboard

COVID-19 fertilizer watch providing information on the impact of COVID-19 on the East & Southern Africa fertilizer market (period 23 April - 26 June 2020)

Logistics indicators*

- Strong impact
- Negative change
- Limited impact
- Little to no impact
- No information/data

Pandemic indicators⁺

- More than 50% increase
- From 25% to 50% increase
- Up to 25% increase
- Stable/No Change
- No information reported

Type	Indicator	23 April	30 April	15 May	29 May	12 June	26 June
Covid-19 toll⁺	Confirmed cases	114	126	261	701	2,506	5,034
	New cases	32	12	99	336	1,162	1,275
Government measures	Health	■ Limited impact	■ Negative change	■ Negative change	■ Negative change	■ Negative change	■ Negative change
	Economy	■ Negative change	■ Negative change	■ Negative change	■ Negative change	■ Negative change	■ Negative change
Measures affecting fertilizer sector*	Port operations	■ Little to no impact	■ Limited impact	■ Limited impact	■ Limited impact	■ Stable/No Change	■ Stable/No Change
	Domestic transport	■ Little to no impact	■ Little to no impact	■ Limited impact	■ Negative change	■ No information/data	■ Stable/No Change
	Transit and border crossing	■ Limited impact	■ Negative change	■ Negative change	■ Negative change	■ Limited impact	■ Limited impact
	Agro-input retail shops	■ Little to no impact	■ Limited impact	■ Limited impact	■ Stable/No Change	■ Stable/No Change	■ Stable/No Change
	Fertilizer sector response	■ Little to no impact	■ Limited impact	■ Limited impact	■ Negative change	■ Stable/No Change	■ Stable/No Change
	Fertilizer stock availability	■ Little to no impact	■ Little to no impact	■ Little to no impact	■ Limited impact	■ Stable/No Change	■ Stable/No Change

* ports, roads, borders, agro dealer shops and fertilizer sector responses

+ weekly changes of diagnosed cases of COVID-19

Sources and methodology: IFDC and AfricaFertilizer.org with funding of USAID Feed the Future ([link](#))

Rapid Assessment & fertilizer Alert

To avoid a food and hunger crisis following the current COVID-19 pandemic, urgent action is needed to address key agricultural challenges, including those identified in the fertilizer sector. The rapid assessment conducted for the current fertilizer alert was carried out in June. The survey included 50 respondents covering six stakeholder groups. 21 participants from 13 different organizations were involved in focus group discussions. It is the plan to repeat rapid assessments on a frequent basis, to identify alerts and determine the immediate action required. More details on the methodology and steps can be accessed through this [link](#).

Purpose

The fertilizer alert aims to assess the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the functioning of the fertilizer sector; it is complementary to the fertilizer watch that is published on a regular basis by IFDC. The sequence of data points measured at regular intervals presented in the fertilizer watch is shared as complementary resource. More details on the methodology used in the rapid assessment can be accessed through this [link](#).

Alerts in other sectors

Similar alerts were produced in June, and others are anticipated in July 2020, to cover the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the functioning of the sesame, potato, seed and horticultural sectors. Working with a similar model in various sectors and countries within a specific timeframe facilitates an interpretation and synthesis of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on food systems at national, regional and global levels, while also providing insights into immediate and practical actions needed to address emerging challenges. It furthermore offers insights into the use of the sector model as a diagnostic tool for supporting strategic development, planning, and monitoring interventions that aim to enhance the functioning, resilience and inclusiveness of specific agricultural sectors and food systems.

The fertilizer alert is published within a series of rapid assessments and alerts in multiple countries, and is a WCDI Sector Transformation publication

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Institutional reference

This fertilizer alert is the result of a collaborative project that brings together experts from Wageningen Environmental Research (WEnR) and Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI), both part of Wageningen University & Research (WUR). They collaborate with partners in the CASCAPE programme in supporting the Government of Ethiopia to increase agricultural productivity in a sustainable way, enhance agricultural growth, and achieve food security; CASCAPE is part of the Bilateral Ethiopian Netherlands Effort for Food Income and Trade Partnership (BENEFIT), which is financed through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Addis Ababa.

Contributing organizations

This rapid assessment of the fertilizer sector for Ethiopia involved at federal level staff of Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA), Ethiopian Agricultural Research Institute (EIAR), Ethiopian Agricultural Research Council Secretariat (EARCS), Cooperative Agency and Ethiopia Agricultural Business Cooperation (EABC). In Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR and Tigray regions, staff of the following organizations contributed to the rapid assessment: Regional Bureaus of Agriculture (BoAs) and Cooperative Agencies and other similar agencies and credit and microfinance organizations. Representatives of Amhara Agricultural Research Institute (ARARI), Oromia Agricultural Research Institute (OARI), South Agricultural Research Institute (SARI) and Tigray (TARI) contributed. Contributions were also made by Bedele Soil Research Centre, Jimma University, SNNPR Cooperative Agency, Amhara Cooperative Agency, Jimma zone Department of Agriculture, Jimma zone Department of Cooperative, Amhara Credit & Savings Institution, Farta Woreda Office of Agriculture, Humera Cooperative Union, Humera office of Agriculture and Rural Development. The survey involved experts and other staff of several Woreda Offices of Agriculture and Rural Development, as well as staff in Kebele Offices and various cooperative unions.

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