Mobile phones to help 1.7 million small-scale farmers increase production during COVID-19 economic slowdown

ROME, ITALY, August 17, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Some 1.7 million small-scale farmers in Kenya, Nigeria and Pakistan will soon receive personalized agricultural advice through their mobile phones as a means to improve their incomes, food security and resilience to economic shocks caused by COVID-19, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) announced today.

The innovative initiative, one of 11 proposals to receive initial funding under IFAD's Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF), comes as a result of a new partnership between IFAD and Precision Agriculture for Development (PAD), a global non-profit organisation co-founded by Nobel Prize winning economist Michael Kremer. Using mobile phone technology, farmers will receive low-cost, customized advice to improve on-farm practices, input utilization, pest and disease management, environmental sustainability and access to markets.

IFAD's RPSF, which was launched recently by IFAD's UN Goodwill Ambassadors, the actor and humanitarian Idris Elba and the model and activist Sabrina Dhowre Elba, aims to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods and food security of rural poor people. Funding for these first 11 initiatives, amounting to US$11.2 million from the RPSF plus $5.2 million in co-financing mainly from governments and implementing partners, will benefit an estimated 6.7 million small-scale farmers in developing countries who are adversely impacted by the economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the proposals financed are two regionally focused initiatives in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa that will provide emergency livelihood support through local farmers' organisations, and eight country-level initiatives in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Nepal, Nigeria, Palestine and Rwanda. The majority of these initiatives, which are embedded in national COVID-

19 response strategies, will be implemented through IFAD project teams and other strategic partners to ensure fast delivery.

The activities that will be delivered include: providing seeds and fertiliser in time for the upcoming planting season; assisting with storage and market transport; supporting local banks to provide credit; and establishing digital platforms for information, training, banking and marketing services. Working through existing project teams and IFAD country offices, the initiatives will draw on existing targeting data to identify and provide assistance to the most at-risk groups.

A second round of funding, which includes 22 initiatives and amounts to $13.8 million, is expected by the end of August. Thanks to generous contributions from key partners such as Canada, additional rounds of funding will follow later in the year.

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IFAD invests in rural people, empowering them to reduce poverty, increase food security, improve nutrition and strengthen resilience. Since 1978, we have providedUS$22.4 billion in grants and low-interest loans to projects that have reached an estimated 512 million people. IFAD is an international financial institution and a United Nations specialized agency based in Rome – the United Nations food and agriculture hub.

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