



IMPACT STORY

**ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE ON TRADE,
FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN LATIN
AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

January 2024

Background

The linkages between trade, food security and nutrition are complex and a priority in the agricultural trade agenda. In order to enhance policy and decision makers' understanding of these linkages and its implications for policy design and implementation, the UNITAR Division for Prosperity and FAO developed the e-learning course "Comercio, Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutrición". The joint course was delivered in Spanish between 12 September and 7 October 2022. It targeted professionals from Latin America and the Caribbean involved in the development and implementation of trade, agricultural and food safety policies, or working in related areas.

The course aimed at strengthening capacities of officers from Latin American and the Caribbean to develop and implement evidence-based trade policies, and to formulate and negotiate trade agreements taking into consideration both their needs for economic growth and structural transformation, as well as their food security and nutrition challenges. The learning objectives of the course were as follows:

- Assess the challenges and opportunities that greater trade openness poses for food security and nutrition.
- Assess different types of trade policy measures and their role in promoting food security and nutrition, to design and implement consistent and evidence-based policies.
- Discuss the main global policy and regulatory frameworks that govern trade, food security and nutrition, including the WTO Agreement on Agriculture and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This was the first edition of the course delivered entirely in Spanish and for professionals from the region. The course delivery benefited from the collaboration of the regional partners SECAC, SIECA, and IICA.



The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have a long-standing collaboration aimed at expanding access to education and training to strengthen capacities of stakeholders, with training activities on a wide range of topics being implemented since 2010.

The partnership builds upon the strengths of both institutions by transforming the knowledge expertise provided by FAO into high-quality learning products and services designed to transfer knowledge, impart skills and raise awareness and takes full advantage of modern information and communication technology (ICT) for greater outreach and cost-effectiveness.

The course welcomed 70 participants (69 per cent women) from 15 countries. From the accepted participants, 80 per cent received a certificate of completion and four per cent a certificate of participation. This Impact Story's data collection consisted of a participants survey -deployed one year after course finalisation. The survey intended to measure the application of knowledge and skills from participants. Two interviews were held with participants to highlight the most significant changes as a result of the course. The survey was sent to 59 participants for whom contact details were available and received 18 valid and complete responses (31 per cent response rate).

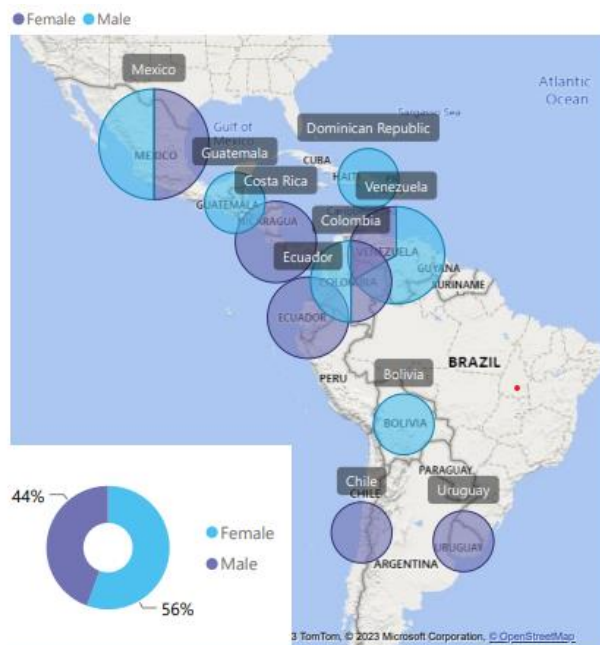
Given the response rate, results at the application level for this impact story cannot be generalized for the entire course participants and only portray the experiences of survey respondents.

Links with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The course was aligned to SDG 2 "Zero Hunger" through erradicating food insecurity and SDG 17 "Partnerships for the Goals" through trade and capacity building.



Application and Transfer of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes and Observed Change



The course in its first Spanish version, registered an outstanding participant reaction and learning experience. Most of the participants (98 per cent) reported to be fully or mostly satisfied with the course and found it overall useful. Over 90 per cent indicated that they found the methodology to be effective and the content relevant for their job. Moreover, 98 per cent indicated the intent to use knowledge and skills from the course.

Eighty-two per cent perceived the information received as new.

Participants who answered the survey come from ten countries across Latin America - encompassing Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Uruguay and

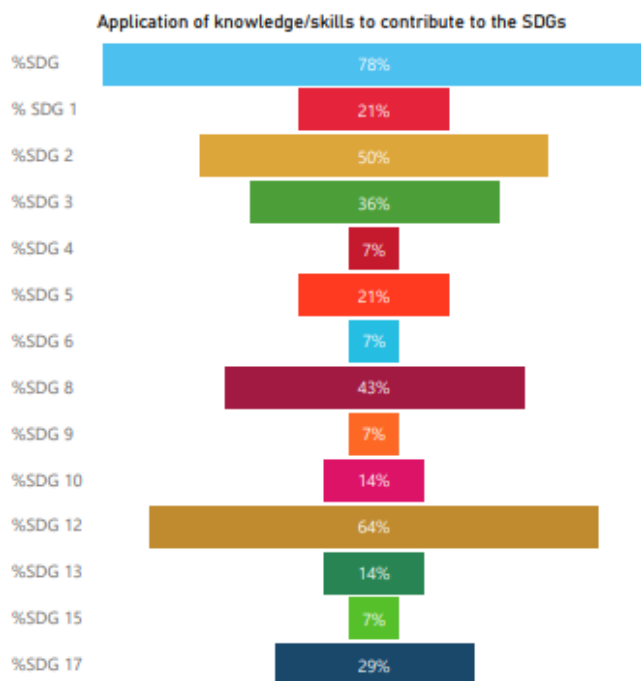
Venezuela. None of the participants reported having a disability; however, one participant came from a country in a special situation. The cohort consisted of 56 per cent female and 44 per cent male respondents, with an average age of 47 years old, ranging from 29 to 62 years old. The majority (67 per cent) work in the government, while 22 per cent in academia and 11 per cent in the private sector. Gender representation was balanced across the institutional affiliations.

Most of the participants (89 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed to have applied the acquired capacities related to learning objectives 1 and 2, which focused on evaluating trade openness impacts and trade policies to enhance food security and nutrition interventions. A smaller yet still substantial portion – 72 per cent – affirmed having applied skills gained under learning objective 3, which focused on discussing global trade and food security frameworks such as WTO agreements and the 2030 Agenda.

Application by learning objectives and gender



Analysis through a gender lens shows that while male participants reported equal rates (88 per cent) of applying skills from all three learning objectives, female participants displayed slightly higher application of learning objectives 1 and 2 at 90 per cent, but a notably lower (60 per cent) rate for learning objective 3.



78 per cent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that application of acquired knowledge/skills substantially enabled advancement towards achieving the SDGs. Higher contributions were reported for SDG 12 (Responsible Production and Consumption), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). Contributions towards the 2030 Agenda fall in the areas of teaching and training, policy and advocacy, working with local farmers, and research and analysis.

Teaching and Training

"Transferring knowledge to university students, future professionals through my lectures and research supervision." (SDGs 3, 5 and 12) – Participant from Costa Rica.

Policy and Advocacy

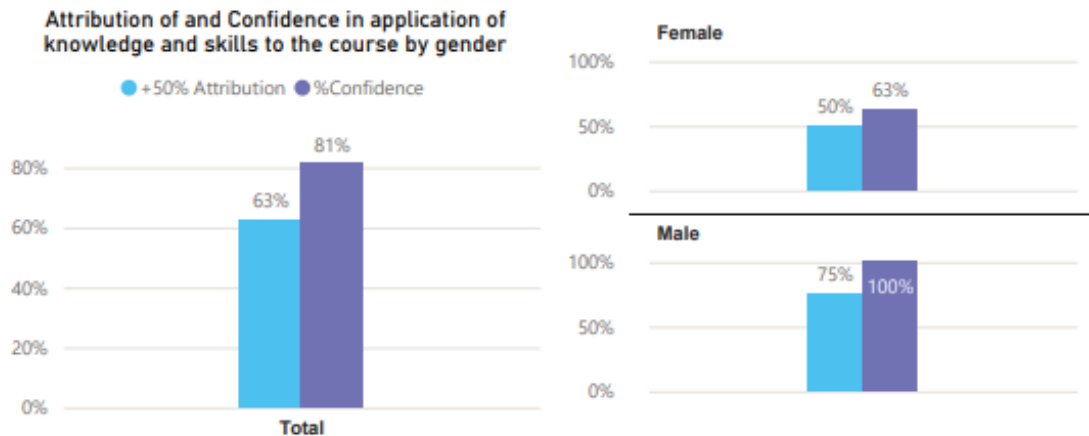
"Aligning local interventions to the international sustainability policy." (SDGs 12, 13 and 17) - Participant from Ecuador.

Working with Local Farmers

"By promoting associativity among farmers and livestock breeders, we have helped improve their income opportunities and increase efficiency in food production." (SDGs 1, 2, 8, 12 and 17) – Participant from the Dominican Republic.

Research and Analysis

"Conducting research projects focus[ed] on sustainable production, responsible consumption, diet diversification and projects that seek local growth of agricultural producers" (SDGs 8 and 12) - Participant from Venezuela.



Sixty-three per cent of the participants attributed more than 50 per cent of the application of knowledge and skills to the course. Eighty-eight per cent of the respondents highlighted that applying the knowledge and skills acquired were fully and very important to their job success.

The vast majority (81 per cent) of the participants reported to be fully or very confident to apply and/or transfer the knowledge and skills. Disaggregating by gender, female respondents reported lower confidence than male participants, 63 per cent and 100 per cent, respectively. Similarly, female respondents also reported lower attribution than male respondents with 50 and 75 per cent respectively.

Key enablers reported were the opportunity to apply the knowledge (100 per cent), content relevance (88 per cent), having sufficient knowledge to be applied (81 per cent), and practical content (81 per cent). The two main barriers to apply the knowledge were rapid technological changes and support of systems and processes, identified by 25 per cent of the participants. Some of the changes reported are:



"Better coordination with micro and small farmers, so that they can generate products for the sale of surplus crops" - Participant from Guatemala



"Opened the doors of knowledge for jobs and alliances related to agricultural trade" - Participant from Venezuela



"The knowledge acquired in the course was very useful to apply it to regulations related to quality food." - Participant from Bolivia

In the following you can read more about what changes to interviewees experienced following the course completion and how they applied knowledge and skills.



Sergio Pérez López

Departmental delegate – Secretaría de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional de la Presidencia de la República, Guatemala

Improved coordination of organizations working on food security

Sacatepéquez, Guatemala. Sergio holds a bachelor's degree in nutrition with a master's in hospital nutrition with a specialization in clinical nutrition. After having worked for ten years in the health sector, he worked another ten years in the area of food security. Sergio is a departmental delegate at the [Secretaría de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional de la Presidencia de la República](#) [Secretariat for Food and Nutritional Security of the Presidency of the Republic] in Sacatepéquez, Guatemala. The secretariat coordinates the actions of several government and non-government organizations working on food security with special focus on early childhood, pregnant and breastfeeding women, teenage girls and older persons. Before the FAO-UNITAR training, Sergio attended a training course on agriculture, sustainability and the environment, but this was the first time he participated in a course linking trade, food security and nutrition. He received an invitation to the course from UNITAR and was attracted by the thematic area that was related to the work line he wanted to implement in his organization.

Sergio's work involves the coordination with several Ministries and national institutions as well as international organizations working in food security, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food [Ministerio de agricultura, ganadería y alimentación]. He is also part of the departmental food security commission [Comisión Departamental de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional] aiming at the integration of food security across the work of different organizations and promoting coherence of these actions.

The FAO-UNITAR course gave him **new ideas on how to approach his work and how to better integrate the work of the institutions** they work with, especially with the private sector and NGOs. At the time of our call, Sergio was working on the annual operational plan for 2024. While he was doing this update he reconsidered how to harmonize more the work of the different stakeholders across the three thematic axes contained in the plan: i) availability – production of food; ii) physical and economic access to diverse and nutritious foods; and iii) purchasing power and utilization - adequate food intake. The plan also includes as transversal topics governance in food security, and commercialization, resilience and environmental sustainability. The plan aims at enhancing capacities of farmers to produce their own food, take care of the environment where they produce the food, and perceive an economic gain from the food surplus they produce.



While the secretariat followed a similar line of work before Sergio took the FAO-UNITAR course, he felt less prepared to implement those lines. After taking the course, he has **more clarity on how to integrate his work based on their operational plan**. The course also helped him identify the different stakeholders with whom the secretariat could work to obtain better results and improve the lives of the farmers. **The e-learning course equipped him with more insights on how to better coordinate with different organizations and how to work together to achieve common goals.**

Sergio's innovative vision to tackle food security has caught the attention of many non-governmental organizations that the secretariat coordinates. The organizations saw this new approach, aligned to their international priorities and strategies, as an opportunity to partner with the secretariat. One of the initiatives derived from the strengthened partnerships is an initiative aiming to substitute the offer of junk food in school stores with nutritious food and the creation of educational gardens.

Having information about the operational plans of other organizations, derived from his close work with different institutions, helped him to frame better his ideas and understand how they could better coordinate with the different stakeholders. Before the course, he was not always sure on how to integrate the work of the different organizations working in food security, which is a substantial part of his work, but now **he has a clearer vision of how to do it**. A challenge that he has encountered is the lack of disposition of some stakeholders to adopt a more holistic approach towards food security in their work.

Nonetheless, he considers that **the course helped him to articulate stronger arguments to convince other actors to integrate food security better and to align to the secretariat's strategy**. He attributes some seventy-five per cent of his change in performance to the FAO-UNITAR course and the other 25 per cent to the strategic partnerships with other organizations that helped him have a good idea of the landscape of the field and, of course, to his personal persuasive power and motivation.

The most useful component for Sergio was the module on governance, trade and food security. This module presented how farmers can generate an income from their work in food production. Sergio appreciates the links of governance and commercialization and suggests ensuring more participation from local governments and including more of their perspectives into the course. Participation of officers from local governments can better stimulate involvement of such bodies in the better commercialization strategies in their respective territories.

You can read Sergio's story in Spanish [here](#).



José Hipólito Rodolfo Mendoza Hernandez–

Associate Research Professor – Colegio de Postgraduados, Mexico

Through training, an educator multiplies knowledge transfer

Tabasco, Mexico. Rodolfo is an agronomist engineer with expertise in water management, who has dedicated three decades to teaching agriculture at the postgraduate level. As an associate research professor at the [Postgraduate College \(COLPOS\)](#) [Colegio de Postgraduados] affiliated with the [Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Government of Mexico](#) [Secretaría de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural del Gobierno de México], he contributes to the institution's mission of addressing agri-food needs and conducting sustainable resource development research.

COLPOS, now part of the Family Farming Knowledge Platform ([FFKP](#)) promoted by FAO, disseminated a call for the "Trade, Food Security and Nutrition" course via institutional email. Rodolfo, among more than 500 applicants, was one of nine Mexicans selected to participate. This course, a collaboration between UNITAR and FAO, marked his first venture into topics offering a socio-economic perspective, like food security, trade, and nutrition.



Motivated to **complement his practical experience**, Rodolfo found the course of high quality, praising the enriching forums for knowledge exchange. Having no prior training in food security, trade, and nutrition, he expressed interest in a follow-up course to deepen his understanding. The course allowed him to **broaden his knowledge and perspective by incorporating a socio-economic approach**.

The knowledge transferred to a teacher is multiplied.

Rodolfo currently imparts knowledge on Water Optimization, Residual Water Management, Irrigation, Mother-Basin relationship and Hydrological basins at master's and doctoral levels at the Tabasco campus, Mexico. With both excessive rainfall and water scarcity in Mexico's tropical regions, water optimization is essential. Most of his students are agronomist engineers, veterinarians or professionals in related fields working in the rural southeastern region of Mexico. As many engage directly with local farmers, **he sees the UNITAR-FAO course knowledge as greatly benefiting his students**. By incorporating trade and food security content from the course, he **complemented his existing study plan**. Despite an apparent gap between his subject and the course content, Rodolfo emphasizes the importance of a socio-economic approach for his students to grasp the broader context of production, market identification, and consumer needs.

The UNITAR-FAO course allowed Rodolfo to enrich his own course, equipping students with broader perspective and practical tools applicable in the field. His students highly valued the augmented curriculum and applied lessons at their workplaces. Many of them join private and public institutions in the sector after their studies, which allows them to monitor their activities and outcome. Two former students **conducted a training session for local farmers on trade openness, regulatory frameworks, and export quality standards** in September 2023.



Rodolfo stressed that the challenges in agriculture extend beyond technical aspects, emphasizing the need to address social issues, such as the profitability of production for local farmers. He mentioned that *“Many farmers stop producing because production is not profitable, which is why it is essential to transmit information and knowledge about trade, food security and surplus management to local producers”*. Rodolfo addressed this need by training his students to address these issues.

Identifying enablers for knowledge transfer, Rodolfo points to **the opportunity to apply the knowledge in the classroom**, the relevance of the content, and its practicality to apply it to the local context, in addition to the support of his supervisors. He attributes over 90 per cent of the knowledge transfer to the UNITAR-FAO course.

You can read Rodolfo's story in Spanish [here](#).



Conclusion

Learnings from the "Trade, Food Security and Nutrition" e-learning course, as part of the collaboration between UNITAR and FAO, have been incorporated into the work functions of some participants. The application rate of knowledge and skills is high (89 per cent) among survey respondents. As the stories of Sergio and Rodolfo illustrate, application areas are diverse, most linked to assessing trade impacts, designing supportive policies, and implementing relevant global frameworks. There are also examples of participants using learnings to strengthen stakeholder coordination, partnership building, curriculum development, and farmer trainings.

Internal knowledge transfer to colleagues have occurred formally and informally in several participating organizations. While not all participants have been able to undertake multiplications yet, some have applied facilitation skills to their daily jobs.

Participants suggested making future sessions more interactive with increased use of case studies tailored to Latin American contexts and as well to continue to organize more training courses in the thematic area. This could further strengthen opportunities for knowledge application.

The UNITAR training enabled participants to substantially advance multiple SDGs, especially SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). This was achieved through diverse applications of acquired knowledge and skills - from integrating sustainability into teaching and policy, to working directly with local farmers on efficiency and incomes, to sustainability-focused research.

Overall, the course increased individual and institutional capacity to design integrated, evidence-based trade policies and food security interventions aligned with sustainable development. Continued collaboration and training can help maximize long-term impacts.