

**African Ministers for Agriculture (Virtual) Meeting on the impact of COVID-19
on Food Security and Nutrition in Africa**

16 April 2020

SUMMARY REPORT

African Ministers for Agriculture convened virtually via ZOOM on 16 April 2020 with the support of the African Union Commission (AUC) Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The meeting was co-convened by Mr QU Dongyu, FAO Director-General, and Her Excellency Angela Thoko Didiza, Minister for Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development of South Africa, in her capacity as Chair of the AU Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment, both of whom delivered opening remarks. Both highlighted the importance of ensuring food security and nutrition and continuation of agricultural activities, including production, marketing, harvesting, storage and value addition during the response to COVID-19.

Mr QU observed that safe food and nutrition was an essential part of the health response. He underlined that the fact that in the African context, the COVID-19 crises intertwines with food crises calls for a holistic approach to address the public health concerns and food security consideration in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. He called for urgent, strategic and coordinated action to ensure that disruptions in food supply chains were minimized as much as possible in the short-term, and to improve the resilience of agriculture production in the medium and long term. In his closing remarks, Mr QU reiterated FAO's continued availability to work with countries, with focus on Africa, to support their implementation of food security and nutrition policies and programmes.

Her Excellency Angela Thoko Didiza emphasized the need to protect food value chains, protect the agricultural producers and ensure continuation in agricultural activities, as well as ensure social security for the vulnerable populations. In her closing remarks, she proposed the establishment of a Task Force, co-chaired by AU and FAO, and including several partners, to align and facilitate monitoring of implementation of the Declaration. The Task Force would build on existing initiatives and strategies to facilitate coordination, including at the regional level.

The main objective of the high-level meeting was to open a dialogue with African Agricultural Ministers to identify actions to be undertaken to minimize the effects of COVID-19 on Africa's already problematic food systems.

The five core topics that were discussed were backed by background papers prepared by the AU and FAO and circulated to Ministers prior to the meeting. These included:

- Social protection: ensuring effective response and inclusive recovery in the context of COVID-19 in Africa;
- Crop calendars and recommended actions during the COVID-19 outbreak in the Africa region;
- Measures for supporting domestic markets during the COVID-19 outbreak in Africa;
- Taking advantage of the mechanism of the newly created African Continental Free Trade area (AFCFTA); and
- Safeguarding input supply chains for small-scale agricultural producers, poultry and livestock in the context of COVID-19 in Africa.

The meeting was moderated by Her Excellency Josefa Sacko, AU Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, with the participation of Ms Maria Helena Semedo, FAO Deputy Director-General. The meeting was addressed by 40 African Ministers for Agriculture; Mr Ibrahim Mayaki, Chief Executive Officer, AUDA-NEPAD; His Excellency Janusz Wojciechowski, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Union; and representatives of the African Development Bank and the World Bank. Other partners submitted written interventions.

In his address, Mr Mayaki, stressed the importance of the continuation of agricultural activities and rapid support to the communities and governments to prevent further deterioration of the food security and nutrition situation. He emphasized that Africa had existing initiatives which should be built on to ensure aligned and coordinated action to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19.

Mr Maximo Torero, FAO Chief Economist, briefed the Ministers on the global impacts of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition.

The EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development observed that the COVID-19 pandemic started as a health challenge, but that it was rapidly developing into an economic crisis. He noted that Agriculture Ministers have an important responsibility: not to allow it to become a worldwide food security crisis. He called for maintaining domestic and international food supply chains. He indicated that as a global actor and a major contributor to the international aid system, the European Union was working in partnership with the United Nations (notably with FAO and WHO), International Financial Institutions, the OECD, as well as the G7 and the G20. In this regard, he indicated that the European Commission had announced, in the previous week, a significant global response package of over 15 billion Euro, a figure that had grown to 20 billion Euro with the additional contributions of EU member states.

The World Bank, African Development Bank and IFAD also informed the meeting of the facilities they had put in place to support African governments manage the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated socio-economic impacts.

The Ministers who are Members of the Bureau of the AU-STC for Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment, made interventions on behalf of their Sub-regions (South Sudan for Eastern Africa, Chad for Central Africa, Burkina Faso for Western Africa, and Egypt for Northern Africa). South Africa is the Chair of the STC and represents the Southern Africa region.

Interventions by the Minister, Members of the Bureau, and all other Ministers can be summarized as follows:

What are governments in Africa doing?

1. Availed funds to support immediate needs of most vulnerable people; for example, direct food support, cash transfers.
2. Put in place special measures to support food production, including provision of inputs for crops, livestock and fisheries (seed, fertilizers, etc). In a number of countries, the agricultural sector has been classified as an essential service to mitigate against food systems disruptions, while adhering to recommendations by WHO/ Ministries of Health.
3. Established livestock restocking programmes, as well as giving particular attention to pastoralists.
4. Provided subsidies for water and electricity to help the vulnerable and low-income earners, especially in rural areas.
5. Availed financial instruments to provide credit to farmers, in particular low-cost loans.

What support are member states requesting from the international community?

1. International support to augment the measures that the African governments have put in place.
2. International support for purchasing medicine and hospital equipment, agricultural inputs and for food - especially cereals.
3. Support to governments in establishing emergency national food reserves, as well as national strategic reserves so that in future countries can better manage impacts of such diseases, pests and disasters.
4. International support to COVID-19, as well as all trans-boundary pests and diseases, such as Fall Armyworm, African Swine Fever and Desert Locusts.
5. Advocacy for keeping global trade open, especially for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Land-locked Countries.

Ministers made the following recommendations:

1. Ensure food safety nets are provided to the most vulnerable, as well as agricultural inputs (crops, livestock, fisheries, etc).
2. Support farmers in the on-going planting season to ensure that the food production cycle is not disrupted.
3. Support and strengthen existing frameworks, programmes and initiatives instead of creating new ones, to improve programme execution and alignment.
4. Support Africa's agricultural transformation framework – the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).
5. Maintain borders open to facilitate trade in foods and agricultural inputs, especially for import-dependent countries and in particular small island nations.
6. Ensure that trade and tax policies are conducive to maintaining food supply value chains.
7. Facilitate collaboration at continental, as well as sub-regional levels in Africa.
8. Urge the international community to strengthen cooperation with Africa, both in fighting COVID-19 and ensuring food security and nutrition.
9. Pursue production at local level and provide post-harvest storage facilities to the extent possible to reduce the import dependency, especially for the basic staple foods.
10. Regard the food security response as URGENT and advocate for the international community to do the same.
11. Ensure that agricultural activities are supported in line with national crop calendars.
12. Ensure that data is collected and disseminated for governments to know the actual impact of the pandemic on food security.

The Ministers further acknowledged and highlighted the importance of mechanization, value addition, e-Commerce and other applications of information and communication technology for agricultural transformation on the continent.

Finally, the Ministers endorsed the *Declaration on Food Security and Nutrition during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, presented by Maria Helena Semedo, FAO Deputy Director-General, with minor editorial changes.

Furthermore, the Ministers also agreed to the proposal by Her Excellency Angela Thoko Didiza for the establishment of a Task Force, co-chaired by her and the FAO Director-General, to monitor the implementation of the key actions in the Declaration and to build on existing frameworks and initiatives in order to ensure effective coordination.