



联合国
粮食及
农业组织

Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Organisation des Nations
Unies pour l'alimentation
et l'agriculture

Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة
الأغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

E

FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR AFRICA

Thirty-second Session

Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, 11-14 April 2022

**Statement by the Chairperson of the 31st Session of the Regional
Conference for Africa**

Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:

ARC Secretariat

ARC-Secretariat@fao.org

*Your Excellency, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea,
Your Excellency, Francisca Eneme Efua, Minister for Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and the
Environment, Chair of the 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa,*

*Your Excellency, Dr QU Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the
United Nations*

*Your Excellencies Ministers and Heads of Delegations to the 32nd Session of the FAO Regional
Conference for Africa,*

Your Excellency, Mr Hans Hoogeveen, Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council,

*Your Excellencies Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Organizations
in Rome,*

Honourable delegates,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address the 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa (ARC 32). It feels like only yesterday when we held the 31st Session, in the first ever virtual Regional Conference hosted by Zimbabwe in October 2020. A record number of 874 participants from 48 member countries participated. This was at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and Members agreed to hold the Regional Conference virtually due to health concerns and restrictions associated with the pandemic.

The 31st Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa was appropriately themed: *Promoting inclusive agribusiness and regional integration for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals*. Achieving the goals of sustainable food systems in Africa, particularly on food security, will depend on significant, broad-based gains in agricultural productivity combined with a successful coupling of the continent's many breadbasket zones and cross-border deficit markets. Promoting agricultural trade and development corridors offer a valuable pathway for seizing these opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic further complicates this scenario. This calls for more commitment and regional cooperation in order to achieve the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The 31st Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa was held at a time when the continent was facing multiple crises that threaten food and nutrition security. These include the COVID-19 pandemic, which is wreaking havoc with its multiple impacts on the entire food system; droughts and floods, Desert Locusts in the Horn of Africa, and wars and civil unrest. ARC 31 made five key recommendations to help Members to safeguard food security and sustainable agriculture development in Africa.

These recommendations are:

1. Harmonising food priorities during the COVID-19 pandemic

ARC31 recommended the continued support and strengthening of member countries in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic to:

- (i) ensure recovery of the agriculture and food systems;
- (ii) mitigate the significant threat to ending extreme poverty and eradicating hunger in Africa;
- (iii) seize opportunities for accelerating innovation and digitization; and
- (iv) support policies for family farmers.

2. **The Hand-in-Hand Initiative**

The Hand-in-Hand (HiH) Initiative is FAO's evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development to eradicate poverty (SDG 1), end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2), while reducing inequalities (SDG 10).

3. **Building resilient agrifood systems in the face of multiple crises**

The major crises were transboundary pests and diseases, climate-change-induced shocks, conflicts, and economic shocks. The 31st Africa Regional Conference made a strong commitment to assisting countries to navigate risk-informed and implement shock-responsive social protection systems.

4. **Programming for Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** Because of their small size and isolation, SIDS are particularly threatened by natural disasters and the impacts of climate change. Many have limited arable agricultural land and are dependent on small-scale agriculture, ocean resources and high-priced imports.

This initiative was launched to address pressing challenges related to food security, nutrition and the impacts of climate change facing the world's Small Island Developing States given their special circumstance. The 31st Africa Regional conference recommended continued support to activities under the initiative.

5. **Transformation of agrifood systems through innovation and digitalization**

The Information and Communication Technological revolution has huge potential in the transformation of agrifood systems, if fully utilized in the sector. The 31st Regional Conference recognised the critical role digitalisation can play in agriculture and recommended support for members' capacity to harness this technology. Some of the projects promoted under this theme include the One Health Approach, the 1 000 Digital Villages Initiative and the Digital Agricultural Innovations and Services Initiative (DAISI).

Ladies and Gentlemen

Between the 31st and 32nd Sessions of the FAO Regional Conferences for Africa, some landmark global events that shape and influence our programming occurred and are worth noting.

The UN Food Systems Summit, 23 -24 September 2021

The UN Secretary-General António Guterres convened the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The Summit launched bold new actions to deliver progress on all 17 SDGs, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems.

As Africa, we were able to present a common position on areas of priority in the transformation of the food systems in the continent. The position was guided by the current challenges related to feeding the growing population amid the environmental footprint of global agriculture, worsening climate crisis, and deepening inequality amplified by the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31

On the last day of the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference, Members endorsed the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. The FAO Director-General QU Dongyu launched it in Rome. The Strategic Framework seeks to support Members in implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the SDGs - particularly SDG 1 (Zero Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) - through the transformation of agrifood systems.

The Strategic Framework focuses on four aspirational goals, the *four betters*: *better production, better nutrition, a better environment* and *a better life* leaving no one behind.

The 2021 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26), 31 October to 13 November 2021, SEC Centre in Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom.

With the impact of climate change becoming more apparent across the globe, the 26th Conference of the Parties was marked by heightened tensions and tight negotiations as pressure from citizens mounts on world leaders to make tangible strides towards the adoption of mitigation and adaptation measures.

After many hours of speeches, discussions and negotiations notable progress made includes:

- World leaders pledged to end deforestation;
- Around 20 major countries pledged to stop funding overseas fossil fuel projects;and
- The United States of America and China signed a pledge to work together on climate goals.

Ladies and gentlemen

Following up my responsibilities as Chair of the 31st Regional Conference for Africa to assess the progress of implementation of the recommendations and commitments of the Session, we have managed to deliver the Regional Conference message through some events, and meetings, with the good participation of our colleagues. However, the in-person activities and visits were limited by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, most activities were conducted virtually.

Here is a brief account of these events:

- **ARC 31 Bureau meeting, 18 August 2021, Virtual**

Meeting with counterparts from the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of Ghana, the Kingdom of Morocco, and the Republic of Sudan. We reported on the state of progress in the implementation of the ARC31 recommendations.

- **Mission Visit to Food and Agriculture Organization, Africa Regional Office, Accra, Ghana 23-28 November 2021**

During the mission visits we were able to (a) interact with the FAO regional leadership, (b) discuss the implementation of the ARC31 resolutions agreed upon in Harare, (c) input into the FAO 10-year Strategic Plans, (d) discuss the preparations for ARC32, hosted by Equatorial Guinea (d) interact with the African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat, and (e) meet relevant government Ministries.

- **ARC 32 Preparation Mission, 26 January 2022, Virtual**

The meeting was part of the ARC 32 preparations in support of our colleagues in Equatorial Guinea. We were able to share our experiences on the roles of the ARC Chair, mission activities conducted during our tenure, and tips and challenges of hosting a Regional Conference, particularly the online aspects.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me take this opportunity to share with you our experiences and efforts in Zimbabwe in transforming our agriculture and food systems.

My ministry is working on transforming the sector through the Agriculture and Food Systems Transformation Strategy (AFSTS 2020-2025) which seeks to revive, restructure, reform, rebuild and transform agriculture from a USD 5.2 billion to USD 8.2 billion sector, in line with the Africa Vision 2030. The ambition is to catapult the country into the upper-middle-income category by 2030. In line with this, the mandate of the ministry has been expanded to include rural development.

In this regard, with the support of FAO HiH Initiative, we are rolling out our devolution agenda, developing spatially-differentiated Provincial Agricultural Investment Plans, to address the territorial dimensions of agricultural investment planning and implementation.

Digitalization of agriculture – Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has a big potential to improve efficiencies in the food systems. Big data can be used for evidence-based policymaking, market intelligence, real-time climate information, precision farming, for farmers and other stakeholders. The ministry is already switching to ICT-based tools for the collection and dissemination of vital agricultural statistics and information to stakeholders. Zimbabwe leads the development of the AgriTech Blueprint for Africa under the smart Africa AgriTech Initiative. The blueprint harmonizes Agritech policies on the continent to accelerate agricultural productivity and efficiency using ICT in the agriculture sector, resulting in the country developing the National AgriTech Strategies.

Ladies and gentlemen

I wish to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those who have taken part in the excellent preparatory work ahead of this Regional Conference, especially the ARC Secretariat. I would particularly like to express my gratitude to the FAO Regional Office for Africa, and the FAO Representation in Equatorial Guinea, who have made a considerable contribution to ensure the success of the Regional Conference.

Lastly, I would particularly like to thank the Director-General of FAO for his tireless leadership, his exemplary vision, and for putting Members' priorities at the heart of FAO's mandate.

At this point, I have the honour to hand over the duties of the Chair of the Regional Conference; I wish my successor, the Honourable *Francisca Eneme Efu*, *Minister for Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and the Environment* of Equatorial Guinea, the greatest success, and a fruitful and productive 32nd Session of the Regional Conference for Africa to you all.

I thank you all for your kind attention.