

## **On the margins of the Seventh Session of the Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (ARFSD7)**

**A Side Event – (Virtual) Organized by ECA, FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP**

**"Conflict-Climate change-COVID-19 nexus: A food systems perspective."**

**01 March 2021 – 12:00 - 13:30 (EAT)**

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENT**

#### **Introduction: African Food systems**

1. Food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, livestock and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded<sup>1</sup>.
2. Food systems worldwide are experiencing immense strain, owing to demand-side drivers (population growth, urbanization, shifting consumption patterns and income distribution); competition for scarce resources (land and water) as a result of climate change; conflicts and political instability; and to the interactions between food production and the ecosystem.<sup>1</sup>
3. The international community has, in recent years, been in a state of crisis management. The nature and scale of humanitarian crises have changed, displaying increasingly complex interactions among social, economic, environmental, geographical, human rights, political, and security drivers and consequences. Particularly, the extent of the challenges facing African food systems and the urgent need for collective action has been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic which revealed extreme inequities and alarming fragilities in today's food systems.
4. Several African countries find themselves facing the frontline of a possible deterioration of acute food insecurity, in some countries driven by Covid-19<sup>2</sup>. Current food insecurity levels, for example, are made worse by measures to control the pandemic and overlapping shocks such as conflicts, extreme weather patterns, crop pests and diseases and macroeconomic difficulties. The African Union's Joint Continental Strategy for the COVID-19 outbreak's response measures are explicitly aimed at ensuring peace and security during the pandemic.
5. Climate Change, Conflict, and COVID-19 are not isolated phenomena. The different actions by governments and other actors to control, manage, mitigate, adapt, and address these factors trigger substantial consequences exposing vulnerabilities in many of the contexts. There are also risks that all three factors can result in interventions being inadvertently caught up in and contribute to worsening the effects of each other. Overall, these factors have exacerbated existing challenges in Africa's food systems. Similarly, these also offer new opportunities to sustaining peace, address climate change, and promote resilience and socio-economic development.
6. Supply chains in Africa are growing and getting longer as most of the farmers' outputs go to urban areas. The rural-urban supply chain for food in Africa has increased by 800 percent in

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<sup>1</sup> FAO (2018). Sustainable food systems: Concept and framework.

<sup>2</sup> [FAO and WFP \(2020\). Early warning analysis of acute food insecurity hotspots.](#)

the last 25 years as food systems expand and lengthen, particularly due to urbanization. This enormous increase in a relatively short period requires equally rapid growth in terms of technology, knowledge, skills, inputs, risk management, and regulations. Meanwhile, increasing risks caused by climate change, energy cost shocks, disease, and insecurity force businesses to seek out smart strategies to address these risks to a long vulnerable chain.

7. Populations of low-income and lower middle-income countries face greater challenges than elsewhere. Different threats are adding up, and there are few options to adapt or mitigate these combinations of risks. All those - businesses, policymakers, consumers, funding agencies - who are engaged in food systems transformations are called to bear in mind systemic aspects and the multiple outcomes and risks to fashion more sustainable and equitable food systems<sup>3</sup>.
8. Protracted conflicts around the World have been one of the causes of a rise in global hunger in recent years. Conflicts are also driving a dramatic increase in the number of forcibly displaced people. Unstable or broken food systems contribute to food insecurity, which in turn, have a negative consequence on social cohesion and can also trigger conflict, as was seen in 2008 during the global recession. Conflicts will often destabilize the agricultural sector, disrupt food production and food systems, fuel the plundering of crops and livestock, cause loss of assets and incomes and result in distress migration/involuntary. Hence, conflicts are a major driver of food insecurity and malnutrition, both acute and chronic. The proportion of undernourished people is almost three times as high in countries in conflict and protracted crisis than in other developing countries. Approximately 167 million undernourished people live in countries in protracted crisis today – roughly one-fifth of all people suffering from hunger<sup>4</sup>.
9. With ten of the 13 current largest food crises being conflict-related, it is evident that conflict is a leading cause of hunger and possibly the biggest challenge to achieving SDG 2, as well as most other SDGs. In places like South Sudan, Somalia and north-eastern Nigeria, where the risk of famine still looms, conflict is the most prominent factor contributing to food insecurity. Food insecure countries have a 40 percent more chance of relapsing into conflict than those that are not food insecure. In these contexts, food security can help to restore stability, strengthen peace, and introduce a sense of normalcy. Stable food systems are central ingredients for achieving and maintaining stability, and service delivery can help foster legitimacy for the State and play a key role in addressing grievances that may contribute to instability.
10. The impact of conflict is further compounded by climate-related shocks and can enhance the risk of political and social tensions to unravel and result in conflict as people compete over scarce natural resources, such as water and productive land. Disruptions in food systems exacerbate existing tensions and grievances as food prices increase, profits for farmers reduced, or access to food is obstructed. Nearly all the World's major food crises are driven by conflict- having broader destabilizing effects. Refugees spill over borders, and in some cases, turn already fragile regions into potential flashpoints.

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<sup>3</sup> [Food systems at risk – New trends and challenges |Policy Support and Governance| Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> FAO (2016), [Peace and Food Security: Investing in resilience to sustain rural livelihoods amid conflict](#).

## **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON FOOD SYSTEMS IN AFRICA:**

11. The way food systems have evolved over the past decades- particularly those in an ad-hoc manner, means that they now face significant risks, which in turn threaten the future of food systems themselves. Food systems have remarkably contributed to climate change, environmental destruction, over-exploitation of natural resources, and pollution of air, water and soils.
12. Climate change threatens to push millions of Africans into poverty by 2030 and unravel hard-won development gains. Many African countries have made significant development achievements in the last few decades, with annual growth averaging 4.5 percent, but increasing weather, water, and climate risks threaten these gains. Since 1970, Africa has experienced more than 2,000 natural disasters, with just under half taking place in the last decade. During this time, natural disasters have affected over 460 million people and resulted in more than 880,000 casualties. In the face of increasing climate-related risks, African countries must urgently scale up adaption and resilience measures<sup>5</sup>.
13. Climate change has also impacted food systems, particularly with extreme weather conditions such as droughts, floods and storms- particularly threatening smallholder farmers who rely on rain-fed agriculture. These continue to threaten crops and livestock production, putting the lives of millions of Africans at risk of food insecurity. According to the 2019 Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition<sup>6</sup>, there are 256 million hungry people in Africa today, of which 235 million are in Sub-Saharan Africa (22% of Sub-Saharan Africa's population).
14. Despite the global average improvement in calorie production and major development of the food and agricultural product markets, huge inequalities in food access and repartition of the added value have emerged, leading to new serious nutritional and social problems.
15. Apart from being a significant source of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, climate change is affecting people and the environment around the World, as shown by the 2018 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (FAO, 2018) also found climate change to be one of the key drivers behind the rise of hungry people in the World, reaching 821 million people in 2017. By the middle of this century, higher average temperatures, changes in precipitation, rising sea levels, as well as the possibility of an increase in damage from pests and diseases are expected to affect several agricultural sectors<sup>7</sup>.
16. 2020 was the second hottest year in recorded history. In 2020, extreme weather adversely affected food production in many countries<sup>8</sup>. Food systems in Africa were exposed to risks from increasingly recurring and protracted extreme weather events. Climate change threatens to wipe out the hard-won gains across the continent within a short time. With the population projected to double to 2.4 Billion by 2050, Africa needs to feed a rapidly growing population in the face of climate variability and extreme weather events<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> [This Is What It's All About: Building Resilience and Adapting to Climate Change in Africa \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org/)

<sup>6</sup> [AUC, FAO, UNECA \(2019\): 2019 Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition](#)

<sup>7</sup> [FAO \(2019\): Food Systems at Risk: New Trends and Challenges](#)

<sup>8</sup> [The dual threat of extreme weather and the COVID-19 crisis: Anticipating the impacts on food availability |Policy Support and Governance| Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Alarm bells ring for Africa's food systems in the time of climate change \(fao.org\)](#)

17. The threats of increasing natural hazards-induced disasters hang over the millions of people living in Africa's population, climate-vulnerable, low-elevation coastal zones<sup>10</sup>.
18. Under given future climate conditions and without changing current cropping practices, simulation models predict crop yield losses and a reduction of food availability for all farm types, and this is in an area where most of the population is already facing food insecurity problems. Large- and medium-sized farms can offset the yield losses induced by climate change and remain food self-sufficient with crop management solutions such as early planting and increased fertilizer use. In contrast, results show that any of these adaptive crop management measures would not be enough to protect small farms from the negative consequences of climate change on crop productivity and food self-sufficiency. These smallholders will remain food insecure. Farmers will need off-farm employment or other forms of social support to cope with climate change<sup>11</sup>.
19. As climate change threatens means of production and the nutrition of the continent's people, policies centred around leveraging science and digital technology and addressing fragility hold the greatest promise to address Food Security challenges<sup>12</sup>.

#### **COVID-19 IMPACTS ON FOOD SYSTEMS IN AFRICA:**

20. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be felt globally, with the total number of confirmed infections exceeding 109 million and increasing by more than 85,000 cases each day. Deaths worldwide are approaching 2.5 million, as of February 2021. According to the African Union's Center for Disease Control (Africa CDC), Africa has experienced around 3,844,799 cases and over 102,097 deaths from its population of 1,36 billion people<sup>13</sup>.
21. The COVID-19 pandemic is unparalleled in its global spread and impact. It has induced a global shock probably like no other, involving deep disruptions to both supply and demand in a highly interconnected world economy. On the supply side, widespread infections reduced labour supply and, hence, productivity due to extensive implementation of containment measures that have even triggered mass business closures and interruption in supply chains, and, consequently, global trade in goods and services. On the demand side, morbidity, quarantines, and unemployment have caused a loss of income, worsening economic prospects, severely affecting household consumption, firms' investment, and governments' fiscal space. Africa, being part of the global economy, has also been severely affected. Despite relatively low morbidity and extent of national containment measures, the COVID-19 pandemic has a formidable negative impact on Africa given its low resilience capacity<sup>14</sup>.
22. Africa's GDP growth is estimated to contract by 1.8 percentage points<sup>15</sup>, setting Africa to experience its first recession in 25 years. Vulnerable populations, including, in particular, daily labourers, female-headed households, and small-scale producers and enterprises, are hard hit. The number of those who live in extreme poverty is expected to increase by 29 million, as per

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<sup>10</sup> [Africa can play a leading role in the fight against climate change \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/research/africa-can-play-a-leading-role-in-the-fight-against-climate-change/)

<sup>11</sup> [ca5724en.pdf \(fao.org\)](https://www.fao.org/ca5724en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [Africa can play a leading role in the fight against climate change \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/research/africa-can-play-a-leading-role-in-the-fight-against-climate-change/)

<sup>13</sup> <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/>

<sup>14</sup> As of 18 February 2021, the number of confirmed cases in Africa has reached 3,783,214 and deaths toll reaching 99,840. Source: Africa CDC @ <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/>

<sup>15</sup> This estimate refers to best case scenario, that of the worst-case scenario assumes a contraction of 2.6 per cent in African economy in 2020 (ECA. 2020 *COVID-19 in Africa: Protecting Lives and Economies*).

ECA estimates, adding to the approximately 450 million persons who live in under USD 1.9 a day. Also, the impact of COVID-19 on hunger in Africa is particularly profound given the existence of about 250 million, or about 30 per cent of the World's undernourished, who could readily be pushed to the brink of starvation.

23. Agriculture around the globe has, to a large extent, continued business as usual. Global food supplies remained largely unaffected, with no major food shortages that have emerged thus far, as do global food stocks. The agri-food sector appears, in general, to be more resilient as compared with the other economic activities, due, mostly, to the essentiality of food. However, in general, the global food system is experiencing a great adverse impact due to restrictions on movement, causing a decline in food exports. This, compounded with export banning imposed by several cereal producing countries and observed interruption in the supply of farming inputs, including chemicals, seeds, finance, and labour at different levels, has affected global agricultural production with potential negative effects on food security.
24. According to a report<sup>16</sup>, the pandemic could nearly double the number of people around the World facing acute hunger. The UN's World Food Programme has warned of a looming global humanitarian catastrophe<sup>17</sup>. In Africa, a continent with already 20 per cent of the population suffering from hunger<sup>18</sup>, additional stress on dominant poor farming systems and supply chains would have compounded effects on the prevalence of food insecurity. Therefore, mitigation and early recovery measures should be formulated and put in place as soon as possible to minimize the disruptive effect on food systems and supply chains, locally, regionally and globally.
25. The food security impact of COVID-19 could be further aggravated considering the effects of economic shocks induced by commodity prices decline, low export demand, low local consumption, and extreme weather events such as storms, floods and droughts and transboundary pests and diseases such as the locust and fall-army worm invasions<sup>19</sup>. FAO estimated that an additional 80 to 120 million could be pushed to hunger at the global level. Also, the impact of COVID-19 on food security in Africa is particularly profound given the existence of about 27 million<sup>20</sup> civilians, including internally displaced people, who live in conflict-scarred nations, including many women and children, who could readily be pushed to the brink of starvation.
26. COVID-19 has further aggravated the food security impact considering the effects of economic shocks induced by commodity price decline and low export demand and weather-related events such as drought and other phenomena, such as locust invasion<sup>21</sup>. FAO estimated that

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<sup>16</sup> The fourth annual Global Report on Food Crises (April 2020)

<sup>17</sup> "We are on the brink of a hunger pandemic," David Beasley, the WFP's executive director, informing the UN Security Council in a video conference, 21 April 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Latest data shows the number of food insecure persons in Africa reaching 256 million (2019-Africa Overview Review of Food Security and Nutrition, FAO-ECA-AUC. 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Current infestation of locust has damaged around 200,00 hectares of farming in Land in southern Ethiopia pushing about one million people to slide into hunger with immediate need to emergency food aid. Damages were also reported in Kenya and Somalia. Due to prosperous present raining season, detrimental effects on the harvest of the new cropping season are projected further exacerbating the food security of about 20 million persons already facing severe food security. The upcoming locust infestation is projected to be the worst in record in 25 years (and 75 years in Kenya in specific).

<sup>20</sup> Executive Committee of the UNHCR's Programme, Regional Update- Africa. Seventieth session, 7-11 October 2019, the number includes internally displaced persons and refugees.

<sup>21</sup> Current infestation of locust has damaged, only, around 200,00 hectares of farming in Land in southern Ethiopia pushing about one million people to slide into hunger in need to emergency food aid. Damages were also reported in Kenya and Somalia. Due to prosperous present raining season,

an additional 80 to 120 million could be pushed to hunger. Assuming Africa will continue to account for about 30 per cent of the World's hunger, it is estimated that 2020 has witnessed adding up about 30-42 million Africans to the already 256 million food insecure.

27. The extent and magnitude of impacts of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition vary from one country to another depending on the infection rate and subsequent policy responses, including in, notably, containment measures. The impacts include investment, labour markets, processing, and trade (cross-border and informal).
28. As the COVID-19 was first detected in Africa at the onset of the main growing season in many parts of the continent, the distribution of essential farm inputs, provision of extension services, and labour availability was compromised due to restricted movement. As countries started lockdowns, challenges related to the response to ongoing pests crises, such as Desert Locust, particularly in East Africa, Fall Armyworm, and the Mango Mealybug, have increased, thereby severely further affecting crop production and rangeland conditions. Agricultural production was also negatively impacted by the poor availability of agricultural inputs. Reference to research data in Ethiopia confirmed that conventional crops' agricultural production might have dropped by 30 per cent.
29. Access to production capital was negatively affected due to uncertainty undermining financing institutions' interest to fund farmers and operators along the food value chains. In both export and local markets, fruit and vegetable production have suffered due to disrupted domestic distribution system for perishable commodities. Consequently, the price of farm produces experienced a decline in many parts of Africa. Key horticultural exports were adversely impacted by a ban on international flights and cargo shipping, reduced demand in export market, and cross-border movement restriction of goods and services. Quarantine measures and other restrictions disrupted trade flows, further affecting food supply.

#### **CONFLICT IMPACTS ON FOOD SYSTEMS IN AFRICA:**

30. The link between conflict and hunger demands increased attention. Current estimates are that 60 percent of the chronically hungry in the World live in fragile or conflict-affected states. If this trend continues and with no action, projections estimate that the number will go up to 80 percent by 2030.
31. The United Nations World Food Programme's study<sup>22</sup> found that countries with the highest level of food insecurity, coupled with armed conflict, have the highest outward migration of refugees. Additionally, when coupled with poverty, food insecurity increases the likelihood and intensity of armed conflicts, which has clear implications for refugee outflows. WFP estimates that refugee outflows per 1000 population increase by 0.4 percent for each additional year of conflict and increase by 1.9 percent for each percentage increase of food insecurity. Food insecurity was also shown as a significant determinant of the incidence and intensity of the armed conflict.
32. In conflict-affected countries, where agriculture and trade are disrupted, a simple food plate can cost more than a day's wages. The World Food Programme's research has found that people on average would have to spend 186 percent of their daily salary on ingredients for a

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detrimental effects on the harvest of the new cropping season are projected further exacerbating the food security about 20 million persons already facing severe food security.

<sup>22</sup> [At the root of exodus: Food security, conflict and international migration | World Food Programme](#)

basic meal such as rice and beans in South Sudan. If someone in New York State had to pay the same proportion of their salary on these ingredients, their meal would cost USD 393<sup>23</sup>.

33. As African women play a critical role in all aspects of the Region's food systems and over 60% of all employed women in Sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture—whether it is growing crops and raising livestock, selling and purchasing food in local markets, or dealing with the nutritional needs of their households, with more stress over resources and heightened tension at the household level, women and girls are being exposed to greater Gender-Based Violence. In IDP camps, worsened socio-economic conditions might expose women to greater sexual exploitation. Isolation undermines women/girls' ability to look for support in traditional community networks. Increasing violence in the household and community can affect women and girls' decisions to play their role in Africa's food systems- affecting lives and livelihoods and reducing production and productivity.
34. Differences in food security shape short-term and long-term outcomes of health and well-being when the ability of individuals and nations to cope with shocks and to smooth income and consumption is limited. In conflict-affected countries, many households and firms are smallholder farmers who face a high degree of income uncertainty even in the absence of conflict, primarily through weather shocks. Two important points are apparent. First, the nature of this 'shock' may be quite diverse across different types and intensities of armed conflict and across the national and local institutions that are either transformed or emerge during this armed conflict. Second, exposure to the conflict may directly shape food security but also interact with other fluctuations, such as those in prices and climatic conditions.
35. In addition to the impacts of conflicts on the nutritional status of the population- particularly children, the long-term consequences and impacts on coping and consumption with households living close to registered conflict events often experience drops in consumption levels, cross-national underdevelopment, increased food prices with a substantial reduction in agricultural production including livestock and a variety of crops.

## **INTERPLAY OF THE "CCC" NEXUS, IMPLICATIONS ON FOOD SYSTEMS IN AFRICA:**

### **I. ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND COVID-19:**

36. The COVID-19 pandemic has a profound negative effect on the global and regional economy and is occurring in the context of a rapidly changing climate. Reductions in national food availability caused by severe weather events tend to be considerably larger in magnitude when they occur during global economic downturns. The risks posed by this dual-threat are particularly high for low-income food-deficit countries. Taking actions to mitigate these adverse effects while building agri-food systems' resilience to future shocks is critical for avoiding major contractions in food availability and associated risks of food insecurity.
37. The impacts of COVID-19 were further compounded by recurrent extreme weather conditions, persistent instabilities and conflicts, and economic slowdowns and downturns. By the end of December 2020,<sup>24</sup> 94.7 million people in East and Central Africa, 79.1 million people in Southern Africa and 124 million in West Africa did not have sufficient food consumption. Without urgent action, natural and human-made hazards will continue to prevent progress toward achieving SDG 2. Similarly, early indicators show that Covid-19 has compounded

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<sup>23</sup> <https://cdn.wfp.org/2020/plate-of-food/>

<sup>24</sup> Regional data aggregated from [HungerMap LIVE \(wfp.org\)](https://www.hungermap.org/)

effects on conflict. Indeed, key hotspots in the Sahel region for food insecurity highlighted by The Cadre Harmonisé (CH) analysis are first driven by conflict.

38. Without aggressive and comprehensive global and local action on climate change, which many African countries are undertaking themselves, other reforms addressing economic growth and human development will be naught<sup>25</sup>.

## II. ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT:

39. Climate change's environmental dimension, such as rainfall variability and water scarcity, can lead to tension, even conflict, among people who rely on seasonal rainfall as a source of water for consumption, livestock, and agriculture. COVID-19 can further exacerbate those tensions as people compete more for resources to sustain their livelihoods, especially those who are smallholder farmers and critical players in African food systems.
40. The Climate Change economic dimension includes evidence that a 1°C higher temperature can lead to a drop of more than two percent in economic growth in developing countries, affecting crop and food production already pressured by the COVID-19. This can result in increased food prices with a higher likelihood of violent conflict. Also, economic shocks in fragile countries can expose young, unemployed people to recruitment by armed groups.
41. When livestock herds are reduced in size by the forced selling of livestock due to climate shocks and scarcity of resources, pastoralists tend to become less mobile, switching to a more sedentary herding system. In this way, they become even more vulnerable in the event of poor rainfall. Alternately, when pastoralists move due to the lack of natural resources – food, fodder, and water – they are more vulnerable to conflict with settled communities.
42. The political dimension of these factors- particularly in Low-income countries with degraded environments which face a higher risk of economic shocks, compounded by food shortages due to containment measures as well as forced migration and disruption of political institutions, are especially challenging to overcome in fragile and unstable environments.
43. Similarly, food and climate change are linked. UN Report shows that 25-30% of GHG emission is through food systems. Therefore, as a risk multiplier, Climate Change, compounded with the COVID-19's socio-economic impact, expands grievances, creating an environment conducive to poverty, conflict, hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition.

## III. ON CONFLICT AND COVID-19:

44. The COVID 19, Climate change, and conflicts dynamically impact lives with economic ripples and supply chain disruptions. The pandemic alone contributes to insecurity and can feed polarisation. Fragile coalitions can become stressed as rival groups push responsibility for responding to specific political parties while tensions emerge between national and local authorities over response to COVID 19. Containment and curfew policies exacerbate tensions around elections. All these contribute to risks of insecurity, deteriorating economic conditions, further stressing African food systems, especially in communities relying on informal and hand-to-mouth means of living.
45. The pandemic affects peace processes and local conflict resolution mechanisms. Attention is being diverted from peace processes to COVID 19 responses. Some armed actors may use this as an opportunity to escalate military operations to change facts on the ground with increased impunity. Despite the UN secretary Generals ceasefire call in peace negotiations, the

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<sup>25</sup> [Africa can play a leading role in the fight against climate change \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/research/africa-can-play-a-leading-role-in-the-fight-against-climate-change/)

disarmament process has not achieved its goals in Mozambique, Nigeria, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Somalia. Moreover, local conflict resolution mechanisms involving face-to-face meetings are likely to be severely disrupted by the prohibition of gatherings.

46. Several risk factors, such as conflict and insecurity, climate change and variability, and their consequences on food supply chains and productivity, affect the dynamics and likelihood of food chain crisis threats. A recent joint FAO and WFP analysis of food insecurity and nutrition hotspots reflect a mix of conflict, economic decline, climate extremes, and the Coronavirus pandemic's socio-economic fallout are driving people into a deepening phase of extreme food insecurity<sup>26</sup>. Overall, 20 countries, many in sub-Saharan Africa, face potential spikes in acute food insecurity over the next three to six months, which require urgent attention, and the pandemic is exposing the existing flaws in food systems, including gender inequalities and the unfair treatment of women and girls.

#### **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

47. The complexity of interactions among actors, processes and influences in a food system means that the analysis and resulting policy and programme recommendations must also take a holistic view of the system and its weaknesses, especially in a situation where almost all aspects of that system are being affected.
48. A sustainable food system lies at the heart of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Adopted in 2015, the SDGs call for major transformations in agriculture and food systems to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition by 2030. To realize the SDGs and the African Union and CAADP aspiration, the global food system needs to be reshaped to be more productive, more inclusive of poor and marginalized populations, environmentally sustainable and resilient, and able to deliver healthy and nutritious diets to all. These are complex and systemic challenges that require interconnected actions at the local, national, regional and global levels<sup>27</sup>.
49. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded existing vulnerabilities in food systems revealing fragilities in how food is produced, delivered, and consumed. The Covid-19, Climate, and Conflict challenges present Africa with opportunities to reimagine strategies and approaches - making necessary shifts from 'business as usual', to integrate better adaptive and context-sensitive approaches and better bridge development and emergency, to reposition the vulnerable, especially children, youth, women, refugees/IDPs at the forefront of adapted policies and interventions. Identify, renew and implement longer-term actions in the food system to facilitate sustained access to affordable and nutritious foods in all contexts.

#### **IMPROVING AFRICAN FOOD SYSTEMS IS VITAL FOR PEACE**

50. Food insecurity at national and household levels is not only a consequence of conflict but can also cause and drive conflict. A higher priority should be for resilient food systems-related policies and programs in conflict-affected, vulnerable, and conflict-prone countries. Such policies and programs build resilience insofar as they are expected not only to help countries and people cope with and recover from conflict but also to prevent conflicts and support economic development more broadly—that is, help countries and people become even better off.

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<sup>26</sup> A joint FAO-WFP analysis of food insecurity hotspots as the coronavirus crisis unfolds - [November 2020 edition](#)

<sup>27</sup> FAO (2018). Sustainable food systems: Concept and framework.

51. Transforming food systems to be resilient and sustainable, including delivering healthy affordable diets in vulnerable communities while also providing durable solutions for IDPs, women, children, and youth through nutrition-sensitive social protection systems increase the purchasing power of these groups enforced by policies that foster behaviour change.
52. A food systems approach is a way of thinking and doing that considers the food system in its totality, taking into account all the elements, their relationships and related effects. The international community has, therefore, a responsibility to work together across silos and at the peace-humanitarian-development nexus in promoting the challenges and stress of Africa's agriculture sector and food systems, addressing the impact of recurrent climate shocks, drivers of violent conflict, delivering humanitarian assistance, respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, and developing institutions, resilience and capacities simultaneously in a complementary and synergetic way to reverse the upward trend of hunger and malnutrition and to end humanitarian needs, in a context-specific manner that ensures functioning and effective food systems.
53. The overview of the situation and trends of food insecurity shows that conflict, climate extremes, and economic slowdowns and/or downturns, often occurring in combination, are key drivers behind Africa's worsening food security trend<sup>28</sup>. Building resilience to conflict and to promote peace and stability is paramount and must include livelihood support to address the root causes of conflicts and conflict stressors and promote re-engagement in productive economic activities, including social protection programs; facilitated community-based approaches help build relationships and social cohesion. Further, investing in and strengthening capacities of political, economic and social institutions (including food systems) will go a long way in ensuring good governance and delivery of equitable services.
54. Solutions to challenges facing Africa, including inclusive poverty reduction, increased agricultural productivity, improved nutrition, and enhanced environmental sustainability, needs a sustainable Food Systems approach that takes into account the complexity and inter-play of the Climate, Conflict, and the COVID-19 factors, beyond one single driver of food insecurity. The vulnerabilities in African Food systems slow down progress towards ending hunger and malnutrition. Solutions need to be holistic, working towards systems that acknowledge and address the three underlying issues of food insecurity, acute and protracted factors of climate hazards, conflicts, and the COVID-19 response and recovery measures.
55. Focus on the alignment and coherence of collective short-, medium- and long-term objectives simultaneously conduct context, vulnerability, environmental, and conflict analysis regularly.
56. Support countries in preventing and mitigating risks; Food system changes need to take account of long-term pressures. To increase the resilience of a complex, dynamic food system, risks, threats and vulnerabilities across the system need to be well understood and analyzed. For this to happen, develop capacities, tools, and partnerships, ensure institutional learning and innovation, and share information. Wherever is possible, bolster public-private collaboration in sustainable food systems development.
57. Since food systems are complex networks of individuals and institutions that provide food for everyone on the planet, they have the mandate to determine the availability, affordability and nutritional quality of the food supply and influence the amount and combination of foods that people are willing and able to consume. <sup>29</sup>To build stronger and more resilient food systems, investing in *nutrition-sensitive agriculture* is important to ensure increased agricultural

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<sup>28</sup> The Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition Report 2019. P60

<sup>29</sup> FAO (2013): [Overview of Nutrition Sensitive Food Systems: Policy Options and Knowledge Gaps](#)

productivity, improved food storage, improved women's status, and increased household resources and incomes.

58. Focus on children's education and nutrition to avoid a generational loss as children are growing without basic services, including education- particularly due to school closures amid the COVID-19 pandemic preventing girls and children of education and school-meals- which in some contexts are considered the most nutritious meal of the day.
59. To advocate for and promote evidence-based policy making and policy alignment and approaches among all stakeholders involved in response to adopt a two-pronged approach to address root causes of conflicts through political commitment and dialogue at all levels, while continuing to provide adequate support and development interventions for the most affected by conflict and climate variables as well as the most vulnerable including women, youth, and smallholder farmers in remote rural areas.
60. Invest more in strengthening livelihoods and food security in countries of conflict and neighbouring countries hosting refugees. Support provided to areas bordering countries is more cost-efficient and brings social benefits in the long-term when countries stabilize.
61. Focus on protecting the smooth functioning of supply chains, with data through investing in the strategic domestic value chain with policy and financial support accompanied by diversifying livelihoods and diets of rural and urban communities while protecting consumers' income and purchasing power. These go with investing in data analysis and monitoring supply chain performance.
62. Boosting the digital and industrial transformation agenda and invest in youth agribusiness promoting innovation and gender inclusiveness.

### **IMPROVING AFRICAN FOOD SYSTEMS IS VITAL FOR THE PLANET**

63. Africa must utilize innovative approaches to increase climate adaptation, resilience, and environmental protection and embedding these into national agricultural and investment plans and scaling-up proven technologies. In the African context, the agenda of transforming agriculture and food systems should focus on addressing the challenges of building the resilience of vulnerable livelihoods, including smallholder farmers and rural communities, with a special focus on women and youth and production systems.
64. Partnerships through strengthening the roles of multilateral, bilateral, and private sector partners can activate capacities and resources to strengthen the resilience of livelihoods to shocks, threats, and crises in Africa's drylands while responding to crises when they occur. These crises impact and constitute significant threats to the livelihoods of vulnerable populations and the achievement of the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the vision of the African Union Agenda 2063.
65. Additionally, the use of market-driven Research for Development and strengthening climate data analysis and reinforcing Early Warning Early Action (EWEA) systems to protect livelihoods remains of relevance and importance for the Food Systems in the Region<sup>30</sup>.
66. Further, accelerate digital connectivity and insight to spot the emerging threats related to the food system and how to react to the variables of insecurity and climate shocks.

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<sup>30</sup> [Alarm bells ring for Africa's food systems in the time of climate change \(fao.org\)](https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/detail/country/AFR/2021/02/24/Alarm-bells-ring-for-Africa's-food-systems-in-the-time-of-climate-change)

## **IMPROVING AFRICAN FOOD SYSTEMS IS VITAL FOR PEOPLE**

67. As the impact of Covid-19 is not limited to one sector, the solutions and recovery cannot be limited to one sector or Region. It should cut across sectors, agencies, and mandates. The African Union and the Member States, International Financial Institutions, UN agencies, and development partners are all required to work together, not just to continue to respond to and recover from Covid-19 but also to make progress in Agenda 2063 and the SDGs- making cross-context progress, particularly in food security, nutrition, and livelihoods.
68. The crisis offers opportunities, including repurposing public expenditure to improve the efficiency of public spending, reinvesting funds to maximize the "triple wins" from the food system (1) productivity and incomes; (2) resilience and climate-friendly; and (3) nutritional outcomes.
69. Expanding and strengthening social protection measures presently in place is a must to save lives and livelihoods in light of high prevalence rates of hunger, malnutrition, and poverty due to the outbreaks of Desert locust, Fall Armyworm, Natural hazards like drought, floods, conflict and insecurity, which continue to be a challenge in Africa. To improve nutrition outcomes, social protection systems should be nutrition-sensitive.
70. Concrete, collective efforts must be immediately exerted to rapidly increase domestic agricultural production in Africa in anticipation of a continued low level of global food supplies due to disruptive pandemic effects on global food chains. Equally important, measures should be taken to ensure the sustainability of the food supply chain, within and among countries, with priority to critical value chains that serve the most vulnerable populations through supporting the continuity of local food markets, value chains, with a specific focus on vulnerable smallholder farmers, including specifically female-headed household, female traders as well as areas that are specifically critical to food supply and vulnerable urban areas. Though- and probably more importantly- African countries should, at the prompt, adopt regionally-based food-reliance, with a focus on food storage, as an approach to achieving food security, implying prudent implementation of cross-borders closure.
71. Economic slowdowns and/or downturns- particularly caused by COVID-19, triggering unemployment and depressing wages and incomes and weakening household purchasing power, are also key drivers of food insecurity, often combined with conflict climate shocks. For policymakers, the immediate problem is alleviating the suffering through interventions to stabilize prices and boost incomes, while in the longer-term, it is just as important to stimulate agricultural output. It is imperative to recognize that the effects of economic slowdowns and downturns cannot be separated from the root causes of hunger, i.e. poverty, inequality and marginalization, and policies must be designed accordingly.
72. Governments must aim to promote broad-based, labour-intensive growth while investing in human capital to achieve a diversification of the economy into productive sectors to achieve a structural transformation that is pro-poor and inclusive. Specifically, investing in and supporting Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) to be more resilient against shocks. MSMEs support 80 percent of Africa's food consumption and 96 percent of domestic supply chains that are crucial to farmers— from input provision, logistics, processing and retailing. Specifically, agro-food MSMEs have been among the first respondents in the COVID-19 crisis. Strengthening MSMEs also creates opportunities for employment and agri-preneurship along the agriculture value chain, as they are a major source of employment, especially for youth and women.