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Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Organisation des Nations
Unies pour l'alimentation
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Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединённых Наций

Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة
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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR AFRICA

Thirty-first Session¹

26-28 October 2020

Concept Note on Actualizing Inclusive Food Systems Transformation in Africa, through leveraging Innovation and Digitalization; Toward UN Food Systems Summit 2021

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has heightened awareness of the key role that food systems transformation can play as an entry point for accelerating progress to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 2 challenges countries to eliminate hunger and all other forms of malnutrition by ensuring that sufficient quantities of safe, nutritious and affordable food are available to all while promoting sustainable agriculture. However, the 2030 Agenda also emphasizes the interconnectedness of the SDGs, and requires that Members achieve this while creating the growth and employment opportunities needed to eradicate poverty, sustaining biodiversity and the natural resource environment, and addressing the growing pressures of climate change.
2. To play their critical role, food systems will need to do more than we have ever expected of them. They will need to deliver reliable food security and nutrition for all and be economically profitable, but they will also need to have a positive or neutral impact on the climate, biodiversity and the natural resource environment. They will need to meet rapidly growing food demand in an increasingly urbanized world, and they will need to evolve in ways that ensure that those least advantaged, the poor, are not left behind. Moreover, they will need to do much better than they are doing today to promote and enable healthy diets in order to curtail a global burgeoning of overweight and obesity that has already become the number one contributor to the global burden of disease.
3. It is widely acknowledged that most contemporary food systems are not fulfilling these larger aspirations, measured against the standards set by the 2030 Agenda. In addition, recent transformations have not been taking food systems in the right direction, or if so, not at the right speed. In the African case, according to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020 (SOFI 2020) report, there has been a rise in the prevalence of undernourishment over the last three years. Today, 250 million Africans remain hungry, and nearly a billion Africans cannot afford a healthy diet.

¹ Rescheduled from 23-27, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

4. These trends in hunger and malnutrition underscore the challenging nature of the quest for a world without hunger by 2030. It is evident that the efforts to transform food systems are confronted by significant challenges such as high population growth, climate change, gender inequality, acute social and economic imbalances and proliferation of conflicts.
5. The situation calls for stepping up efforts, necessitating some form of deep, transformative change to redirect the arc of food systems evolution toward sustainable development. Technology and digital innovations should be leveraged to achieve that goal. Digital tools provide huge opportunities for integrating producers in a digitally driven agrifood system and improving productivity, reducing time and cost of operations, and contributing to quality and safety of food products. Access to the most recent, high quality and relevant scientific knowledge, information and research data facilitates innovative solutions, and this needs to be supported through institutional, national and international policies as well as openly available data.
6. Leveraging digital tools to their fullest potential requires a new set of skills and technical expertise. Young women and men are often more ready and eager to master these new technologies and apply them to agrifood systems to increase productivity and solve challenges (World Farmers' Organization, 2017). At the same time, these technologies can help demonstrate to youth how the agrifood sector can be a viable and profitable business opportunity, increasing the desirability of agriculture-related career paths, in lieu of alternatives youth might otherwise be seeking.
7. The reality of transformative food systems development as a key driver for food and agriculture development has long been recognized in the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), featuring FAO's technical and policy work in many ways. A distinctive food systems-oriented approach to many of FAO's long-standing concerns (agricultural sustainability, poverty reduction, improved access to investment and finance, for example) has emerged in the last decade, and highlights the significance of food systems transformation as a theme linking different aspects of FAO's work in a more holistic frame. Even more recently we have seen a growing demand for better integration of FAO analytical work across multiple domains through integration of data and analysis using a food systems lens. The common agenda of technical programmes across a wide range of disciplines and activities ranging from markets and trade to plant and livestock genetic resources, and from work on poverty and malnutrition to work on land, soil and water resources, and climate change, appears to be converging around the central importance of food systems transformation as a principal driver of sustainable development.
8. It would be difficult to overstate the critical importance of innovative food systems transformation as an increasingly central theme shaping FAO's future role and work in food and agriculture. The technical platform for data sharing and analysis that is being developed for the Hand-in-Hand Initiative has been designed to examine key policy and investment issues through a food systems transformation perspective. Specifically, the technical platform recognizes the need to identify and evaluate the interactions, interdependencies and trade-offs among different investment and policy choices beginning with a choice of one among several possible objectives, such as increased efficiency or productivity. Then, after a selection of a package of innovations, investments, policy and institutional changes, the platform recognizes a food systems analysis to examine the impacts of those policies on other Agenda 2030 objectives (such as eradicating poverty, protecting biodiversity and land, soil and water resources, and mitigating or promoting resilience to climate change).

II. Expected Outcomes of the High-level Special Session

9. The High-level Special Session provides an opportunity for participants to discuss and exchange information on issues of food systems transformation in the context of Agenda 2030, giving special focus to innovative approaches to accelerate this transformation.
10. The session aims towards an enhanced recognition and appreciation among participants of the need to embrace a holistic approach and pursue accelerated actions along food systems transformation to achieve Agenda 2030, with a particular emphasis on the role of digital innovation.
11. The session will also provide an opportunity for participants to be updated on preparatory activities towards the UN Food Systems Summit 2021.
12. The High-level Special session will commence with remarks by the UNSG Special Envoy for the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, Ms Agnes Kalibata, who will introduce the rationale for, and the key elements of the process towards the Summit. This will be followed by a presentation by the Secretariat on leveraging innovation and digitalization in the transformation of Africa's food systems. An open discussion will then obtain delegates reflections on the process towards the Summit and their guidance to FAO as the Organization supports models and systems for food systems transformation.
13. Issues that could guide the discussion:
 - a. New and bold innovative approaches are required for a successful food systems transformation, in an intersectoral and multistakeholder framework. Would this entail a new role and function for leaders (e.g. Ministers for Agriculture) in bringing on-board other sectors and stakeholders? What does the experience look like in this regard, and what needs to change?
 - b. Women and youth are recognizing untapped opportunities in the agrifood sector. What supportive ecosystem/collaborative efforts are needed to allow these important players to progress faster and successfully along their journey, in order to realize the ambition of scaling up tech-enabled, environmentally conscious, market-led ventures to deliver jobs and healthy food?
 - c. What opportunities does the private sector see in pursuing food systems transformation in terms of investing in healthy and nutritious food, resource efficiency, leveraging innovation and technology, etc.? What kind of partnership strategies would be helpful for success in this regard?
 - d. In what ways could organizations such as FAO better support countries in the drive towards inclusive food systems transformation, which leverages on innovative solutions?
 - e. How could the Africa region be better prepared to contribute to the UN Food Systems Summit 2021?

Agenda and participants

09.00-09:02 GMT/UCT	Welcome and Introduction – Dr. Helder Muteia, Subregional Coordinator, Central African Region
09.02-09.15	Dr. Agnes Kalibata, United Nations Secretary-General Special Envoy for the UN Food Systems Summit 2021
09.15-09.25	Jamie Morrison, Director, Food Systems and Food Safety Division, FAO. Presentation on FAO's support to Food Systems Transformation
09:25-09:35	Perspective from Farmers' Organization - PAFO Perspective from the Private Sector
09:35-09:40	AUDA/ NEPAD CEO Dr Ibrahim Assane Mayaki
09.40-10.55	Open discussion – Experiences and Perspectives
10:55-11:00	Wrap-up, Closing Remarks, Moderator and Chair