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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR AFRICA

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Concept Note - COVID-19 and its Impacts on Agrifood Systems, Food Security and Nutrition: Implications and Priorities for the Africa Region

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

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1. The outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the measures put in place to control or mitigate its impact, and the economic recession induced by the crisis are worsening the food and security situation in Africa. This has become a significant threat to ending extreme poverty and eradicating hunger in Africa, and risks wiping out the modest gains made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the Malabo Declaration and Agenda 2063.
2. Globally, the impact of COVID-19 on economic growth and poverty is much worse than earlier predicted. Projections from the World Bank (WB) estimate that the pandemic will push up to 60 million more people into extreme poverty in 2020, particularly in rural areas. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), economies are predicted to contract by 2.8 percent in 2020, while per capita income is projected to decline by 5.3 percent. The pandemic halted a period of economic growth registered in many countries during 2019 and is expected to result in severe recession in Africa.
3. While COVID-19's initial impact was centered in urban areas, it also spread to and affected rural areas that are generally more vulnerable to the effects. Nevertheless, containment measures pose new challenges to rural economies in maintaining food security, especially for the most vulnerable, notably rural women. These measures affect income-generating activities because they reduce economic opportunities and access to nutritious foods, while also increasing

¹ Rescheduled from 23-27 March 2020, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

women's workloads and the risks of gender-based violence. The recovery from COVID-19 will likely be slow and uncertain.

4. FAO has been collaborating with the African Union (AU) Member countries, sister United Nations Agencies such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and other development and resource partners such as the African Development Bank (AfDB) the European Union (EU) in the efforts towards preventing COVID-19 pandemic – a public health crises - from becoming a food crises. This has been achieved through enhanced advocacy and partnerships, data and knowledge sharing, rapid assessments of impacts, in engaging policy-makers early on. The African Ministerial Meeting held on 16 April 2020 as well as the joint meeting of African Ministers responsible for Agriculture, for Trade and for Finance that was held on 27 July provided guidance on priority actions. The AU-FAO Joint Taskforce that was established through the Agriculture Ministerial Declaration has been instrumental in bringing together the efforts of strategic partners (AU Commission, AU Development Agency, FAO, IFAD, WFP, WB, AfDB and EU) to collaborate in supporting the implementation of the priority areas of actions. Subsequent to the July 27 Joint meeting of ministers of Agriculture, Trade and Finance, the AU-FAO Joint Taskforce has been extended to include additional partners who play a key role in promoting trade in agrifood systems.
5. At country level efforts were directed towards assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on food systems, including food security and nutrition, rural poverty, trade and markets, agricultural production and prices and other related aspects, and to inform policy and investment decisions. It is necessary to generate new evidence for the development of stimulus programmes. A considerable part of these initiatives should meet the needs of the poor as they are more vulnerable and exposed to the impact of the pandemic, and have limited capacity to cope. Social protection programmes will be critical to meet the needs of the most affected and at-risk vulnerable populations as well as for recovery and resilience interventions.
6. FAO launched a comprehensive COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, aimed at preventing a food emergency during and after the COVID-19 pandemic while working on medium to long-term development response for food security and nutrition:
 - a) Reinforcing Global Humanitarian Response Plan to address the impacts of COVID-19 in Food Crisis contexts;
 - b) Collecting and analysing data and providing timely information to guide the policy response;
 - c) Maintaining support for poverty reduction and economic inclusion, ensuring that social protection works for rural as well as urban residents;
 - d) Providing trade policy support, with a special focus on intra-regional trade and ensuring public confidence in food safety through targeted support for adherence to food safety standards;
 - e) Preventing the next pandemics of animal origin through an extended One Health approach;
 - f) Boosting the resilience of smallholders for COVID-19 recovery; and
 - g) Seizing opportunities not only to address current food supply bottlenecks and vulnerabilities, but also to promote Food Systems Transformation.
7. Interventions should consider also specific gender roles in agrifood systems and address their specific, multiple needs as guardians of household food security, food producers, farm managers, processors, traders, wage workers and entrepreneurs. Interventions should also

- integrate women and their organizations and informal networks in the design and implementation of COVID-19 response and mitigation strategies.
8. FAO's support to Members, especially in the Africa region, include engaging policy-makers, in collaboration with the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), to give priority to investments in food and agriculture, with the support of development partners, to address COVID-19 impacts rapidly and effectively. Efforts have been directed at developing action-oriented solutions, including sharing knowledge products and good practices and enhancing national and regional capacities, in collaboration with UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and other development partners. In this respect, FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme provides a comprehensive and coordinated approach for dealing with the challenge.
 9. The changing development landscape brought about by COVID-19 also provides opportunities to focus on strengthened collaboration with countries and demonstrate how FAO can provide the foremost technical expertise and knowledge to strengthen Members' response and recovery.
 10. Going forward, FAO in Africa needs to focus on the emerging priority areas of work, including:
 - a. Support Members in designing and implementing socio-economic impact assessments to measure the impact of COVID-19 on food security, nutrition and functioning of food systems, with specific interventions to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on rural women and girls. This support helps governments make informed policy and investment decisions in their COVID-19 responses and strengthen food and agriculture in recovery and resilience plans;
 - b. Support Members in making nutritious foods available and affordable by designing and implementing interventions that draw from the recommendation in the SOFI 2020 report;
 - c. Provide support for countries to establish and promote multi-sectoral approaches for addressing food security and nutrition. Such initiatives should involve a centralized strategic planning hub, and embrace relevant ministries, the private sector, civil society and development partners, and focus on evidence-based decision-making based on sound data and information systems;
 - d. Encourage expanded social protection instruments as essential parts of protecting livelihoods and household food security and nutrition. Since such programmes place a large fiscal burden on governments, FAO supports countries in their design and implementation of more efficient, cost-effective and innovative social protection programmes by adjusting programme design, management tools and delivery systems;
 - e. Support governments and private sector institutions in their development and implementation of enabling environment reforms, mechanisms, and capacity building measures adapted to the needs of agrifood enterprises;
 - f. Support the efforts of the AUC, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, and AfCFTA Members and other stakeholders for quick implementation of the free trade agreement, by encouraging market transparency and governance mechanisms, supported by up-to-date and credible trade-related information and data;
 - g. Foster continued dialogue on the establishment of an Africa Food Safety Agency to enhance harmonization and coordination of food safety standards and legal frameworks and promote risk-based programming and decision-making;

- h. Support countries and RECs to seize the opportunities for accelerating innovation and digitization, including working with partners to (i) scale up digital technologies for providing various agrifood services (extension, markets, finance, etc.); (ii) improve functioning of markets and trade, including trade digitalization access to digital tools and trade-related information through online platforms; (iii) scale up investments in development of digital skills to equip Members for the jobs and businesses that are required for COVID-19 recovery and resilience; and (iv) promote matchmaking to foster partnerships with private technology providers and producer associations on digital solutions.
11. A presentation by FAO on the topic will set the scene for interactive discussion among members and partners.
12. Ministers are invited to share their country experiences, identifying best practices, innovations and lessons learnt as well as discuss the implications of COVID-19 for FAO's regional priorities going forward.

13. Agenda and participants

11.30-11:33 GMT/UCT	Moderator - Welcome and Introduction – Robert Guei, FAO Subregional Coordinator for West Africa
11.33-11:45	Abebe Haile-Gabriel, ADG, FAO Regional Representative for Africa. Presentation on COVID-19 and its Impacts on Agrifood Systems: Implications and Priorities for the Africa Region
11.45-12.15	Intervention by H.E. Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development, South Africa; Chair of the AU/STC on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment
	Intervention by Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, FAO, Co-Chair of the FAO-AU Joint Taskforce on COVID-19 response
	Intervention by World Food Programme Representative
	Intervention by the European Union Representative
	Intervention from the African Development Bank
	Intervention from Private sector representative Perspectives from CSO representative
12.15-13:25	Open discussion – Experiences and Perspectives from members and participants
13:25-13:30	Wrap-up, Closing Remarks,- Moderator and Chair