

CONCEPT NOTE

Strengthening the African Agricultural Research and Development Towards Improved Africa Food System



Background

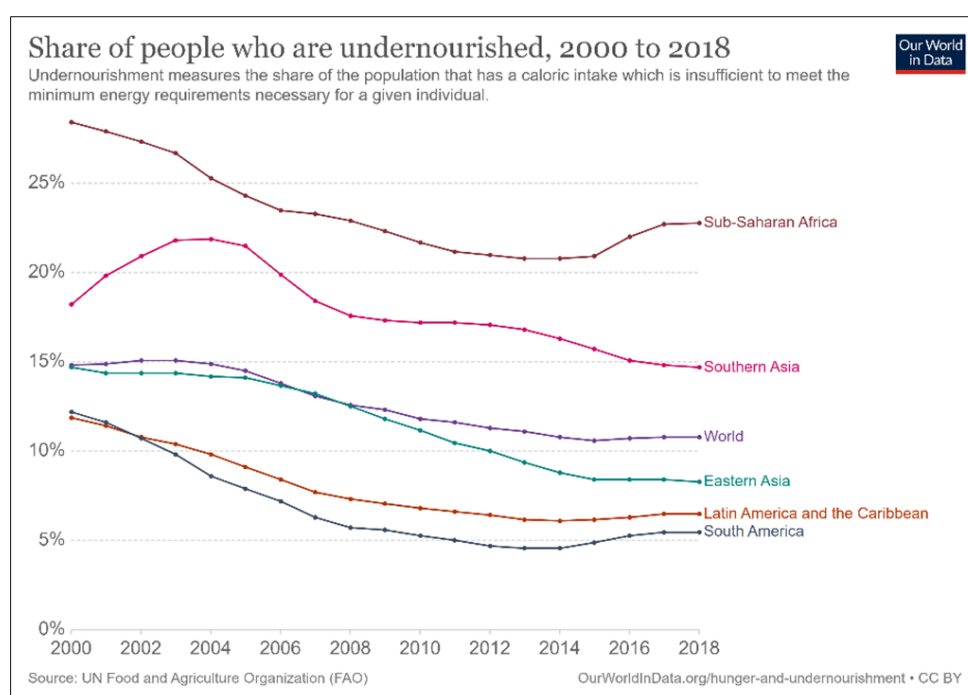
At the instance of the United Nations Secretary General, the 2021 Food Systems Summit has been proposed to be the launch pad for renewed bold steps that will fast-track the delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2021 Summit will draw the attention of the world to the urgent transformation of the world's food system. Highlights of the summit will include a dialogue on improving the Africa Food System through enhanced and strengthened agricultural research and development (R&D).

Guided by the seventh Commitment on mutual accountability to actions and results, the African Union Biennial Review Report has been a powerful instrument for advocacy at the continental, regional and national levels for triggering the necessary policy actions for agricultural transformation in Africa by 2025. The periodic review has shown significant lapse in our collective efforts to make the Africa continent food and nutrition secure within the decade. For example, the second edition of the review showed that only four countries are on track towards the achievement of the required milestone.

This situation shows that there is a lot to be done in Africa's march towards the transformation of the agricultural sector towards the achievement of food and nutrition security, poverty reduction and improved livelihoods.

It is envisaged that the timely realization of the Malabo Declaration is crucial to Africa's attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. These goals are all interdependent and intricately linked with overwhelming dependence on a strong food system wherein the SDGs swim or sink in Africa. The African food system thus becomes the de facto Achilles heels on which coherent and concise actions must be forged to avert the exacerbation of the prevailing food insecurity and nutritional disaster in Africa.

At the global scale, the UN has set a global target as part of the Sustainable Development Goals to "end hunger by 2030" (SDG 2). It is noteworthy that across many regions, the overall prevalence of hunger has fallen since the millennium from 14.8% in 2000 to 10.8% in 2018. Despite these reduction in the prevalence of hunger worldwide, increases in hunger levels have been observed and currently, the realization of the 2030 targets by many African countries seems far from being reached.



This increase in hunger levels is largely a result of increases in hunger levels in Sub-Saharan Africa (where levels are currently above 20%), and small increases in the Middle East & North Africa as shown in Figure 1. The FAO has linked this increase in hunger levels to the rising extent of conflict-affected countries and compounded by climate-related factors such as the El Niño phenomenon. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic could cause severe negative changes to Africa's food system.

Apart from hunger and malnutrition, extreme poverty in Africa has increased from 413 million in 2015 to 437 million in 2019 (5.8%). Forecasts suggest that without significant shifts in policy, extreme poverty will still be in the double digits in sub-Saharan Africa by 2030. If circumstances remain the same, global poverty will become increasingly African, rising from 55% in 2015 to 90% in 2030. This grim statistic must be vigorously mitigated, and this African scenario calls for urgent transformative interventions. This calls for a well-thought-out African Strategy that is based on the application of STI and solid partnership frameworks within the Africa Food System.

Africa's food system can be much better leveraged to accelerate poverty reduction, on and off the farm to ensure food and nutrition security. Africa's food imports have risen sharply over the past couple of decades (from around US\$ 10 billion in the early 2000s to US\$ 35-40 billion more recently). Boosting the productivity of farmers can help poor Africans who are mostly farmers leverage the food system, earn more money from what they grow and help meet the demand coming from cities for higher-value crops. This must be accompanied by public investment in agricultural research, innovation, and extension. There is large scope for technology and inclusive sourcing to help connect poor farmers to better production techniques and more lucrative markets, bringing them into the value chain more effectively.

With 20% of the global population found in Africa and 75% of the population drawing their livelihoods largely from agricultural systems with gross deficit in science, every effort to raise agricultural productivity will translate into improvement of livelihoods. In the last few years, the challenge for African ag-

ricultural productivity has been further hampered despite the abundance of natural resources and a young population (60% youth). Africa thus remains largely dependent of food imports which has kept Africa in the 'net importer of food' status.

The 2021 food system summit which is scheduled for September 2021 offers Africa the opportunity and an entry point to strengthen global advocacy for Africa's AR4D systems. The continent needs to have a strategy to make the UN 2021 Food System Summit count through a deliberate concerted strategy for transformative reforms. There must be well thought-out bottom-up coherent game plan that engages local, national, regional, and continental level buy-ins with a consistent tenor.

It is based on the foregoing that the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and partners, as the continental instrument for forging collective action across the continent have the obligation to engage all the continental mechanisms to prepare actions towards a successful outing at the Summit. FARA intends to work closely with its regional partners (ASARECA, CCARDESA and CORAF, NASRO and AFAAS) and the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) to achieve this objective. This collaboration seeks to present a strategic platform that fosters continental and global collective actions including networking to strengthen the innovation to impact pathways of Africa's agricultural research and food systems.

It is our conviction that Africa needs to have a carefully elaborated position at the Food System Summit that is strong, coherent, and consistent.

One such instrument for attaining our goal is through a solution-oriented policy brief which emphasizes the opportunities of African food systems innovations. This policy brief is expected to give a stronger voice to the agricultural research and knowledge community towards improved African Food System. FARA thus, plans to host continental webinar sessions in February and March 2021 to bring together major stakeholders and partners in the food system fraternity to deliberate and come up with a stronger voice from Africa to the 2021 Food System Summit.

Objectives

The main objective of this consultative meeting is to provide a platform for key stakeholders in the agricultural research for development space to discuss salient options for the AR4D mechanisms to strengthen the food system on the African continent. The session will further allow participants to think through how to engineer a repositioning of Africa for the attainment of the SDGs within the decade, given the emerging BR Reports.

The specific objectives are:

1. To facilitate a consultative e-Forum to review the major issues and challenges confronting the African food system.
2. To elucidate pragmatic game-changing options for the African food systems in the context of the UN Food systems post summit actions given the short time frame to 2030.
3. To propose solutions that will enhance the deployment of science and innovation to provide the necessary catalysts of the food systems in Africa in the context of S3A.
4. To come up with the One Africa Voice (policy brief) to the 2021 UN Food System Summit on AR4D (African message to the Summit).
5. To provide modalities of moderating comments on the six (6) Papers (Draft) of the Group.
6. To develop and present the African strategy trajectory to the pre-summit and the main Summit.

Output

1. The main outputs expected from these webinars include:
 1. One Africa Voice (Policy Brief) to the 2021 UN Food System Summit on Africa AR4D (African message to the Summit) developed.
 2. Developed African strategy trajectory to the pre-summit, the main Summit and elucidation of post-summit activities in the context of achieving the SDGs.
 3. A strategic African policy that elucidates game-changing options for agricultural STI and enhanced food security in the context of S3A.

Approach & activities

1. Two virtual webinar sessions are envisaged. The first session will discuss collective actions that will lead to the preparation of the draft African Policy Brief on AR4D. The second session will focus on the validation of the synthesized African Voice to the UN Food systems Summit.
2. Both webinars will be facilitated and moderated by experts in food systems in Africa.
3. Participants at the webinars will discuss and provide pragmatic solutions to the issues pertaining to the food system in Africa. The moderator/facilitator will lead the preparation of a policy brief to represent a strong African Voice towards the enhancement of the food system around the globe. If necessary, the moderator will be supported by someone with Science Writing skills.
4. Prior to the webinar, the six draft papers of the Scientific Group will be shared with participants and FARA Partners for their review.

Expected Participants

The envisaged partners and stakeholders include the CAADP-XP4 Partners (ASARECA, CCARDESA, CORAF, AFAAS, NASRO, and FARA), Policy-Makers (Permanent Secretaries from Ministries of Agriculture and country-level selected focal persons to the UN Food Summit 2021), Researchers (DGs of the NARS), Academia (Universities and Academy of Sciences), Farmer Associations (Continental, Regional and selected country-level), and other key partners within the food system space in Africa (TAAT, CG, etc).

Activity location, Date

The webinar sessions will be hosted from the FARA secretariat in Accra, Ghana.

The proposed dates of the webinars are:

Session I: February 16th, 2021

Session II: March 9th, 2021.

The webinar will be held in English. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in French.

The link to register for the webinar is FARAAfrica Meeting 2021

The programme for the First webinar session on February 16th, 2021 is as follows:

Time (GMT)	Activity	Responsibility
09:00 – 09.10	Opening Session	Dr Alioune Fall (Chairman Board of Directors, FARA) Prof Joachim von Braun (Chair, UN FSS Science Group)
09.10-09.15	Scene setting	Dr Akinbamijo (ED-FARA)
09.15-09.35	Keynote Paper: Raising the Productivity of Africa's Food systems: A question of Science Technology and Innovation	Dr Abebe Haile-Gabriel (ADG FAO Africa)
09.35-10.15	Synthesizing the African Voice: A panel discussion Dr. Harold Roy-Macauley Dr. Angela Moreno Prof. Florence Wanbugu Dr. Shadrack Moephuli	Dr. Dennis Kyetere Executive Director, AATF
10.15-10.30	Q&A	
10.30-11.00	Comments by SROs CORAF ASARECA CCARDESA AFAAS NAASRO	
11.00-11.10	Closing Remarks and way forward	Dr Akinbamijo (ED-FARA)

Prof Mandi Rukuni – Consulting Facilitator