



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

32nd Session of the Regional Conference for Africa

Opening Statement

By

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13 April 2022

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea,
Your Excellency, the Chairperson of the Regional Conference,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I wish to convey my appreciation to the **Government and people of Equatorial Guinea** for hosting the 32nd FAO Regional Conference for Africa.
2. The excellent collaboration in preparation for this Regional Conference is a testimony to our longstanding and fruitful partnership.
3. Like the tall **ceiba tree** on the flag of Equatorial Guinea, we too must stand tall in facing Africa's many complex challenges.
4. Hunger is on the rise on the Continent, affecting **282** million people - an increase of **46** million.
5. This rise is due to a combination of factors, often overlapping, such as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts and other humanitarian emergencies, animal and plant pests and diseases, and the negative effects of the climate crisis.
6. As we are convening, a severe **drought** is threatening **East Africa**.
7. In addition, the **war in Ukraine** is having a direct impact on prices of food commodities, energy and agricultural inputs such as fertilizer – further increasing food security challenges.

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. We are meeting here in Malabo in the same room where the **African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government met in June 2014** and committed to **end hunger in Africa by 2025**,
9. And to transform the agriculture sector to achieve the **2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development**, and **Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want**.
10. **Time is running out!**
11. We need **extraordinary efforts** across the Continent in order to achieve these aspirations.
12. We need **agility and innovation** to face all these challenges and to overcome **poverty and hunger** in the region.
13. **Agrifood systems** can play a central role and they must be at the center of our actions.
14. We must urgently move to **transform our agrifood systems to be more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient and more sustainable**.
15. **For Africa, a more efficient agrifood system is a priority**.
16. I welcome the **African Union's** decision to declare **2022 the Year for Nutrition**,
17. Together with the interlinked need to transform agrifood systems to achieve better nutrition.
18. FAO remains a **committed partner** of the African Union, and together we can drive real progress with tangible results.
19. At this Regional Conference, together with the African Union, we will launch new **guidelines for investing in youth across agrifood systems**.
20. This is the latest in a series of initiatives aimed at supporting **African youth in agriculture**.

Dear Colleagues,

21. The **FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31** is the fruit of consultations with you and it guides our work.

22. Central to the Framework are our common aspirations of the **Four Betters: Better Production, Better Nutrition, a Better Environment and a Better Life for all, leaving no one behind.**
23. The Four Betters shape how FAO will contribute directly to the **Sustainable Development Goals,**
24. And will guide FAO's support to Members in their follow up to the **UN Food Systems Summit.**
25. The Four Betters reflect the **interconnected economic, social and environmental dimensions of agrifood systems,** and provide a strategic and system-oriented approach across all FAO's work.
26. Now, we must work together to implement the Strategic Framework and its **4 main priorities in Africa:**
 - **One:** Sustainable Agrifood Production Systems;
 - **Two:** Efficient and Equitable Food and Nutrition Systems;
 - **Three:** Climate action and sustainable natural resource management; and
 - **Four:** Building resilience and ending poverty.
27. FAO's flagship initiatives further support implementation of the programmatic priority areas of work.
28. The **Hand-in-Hand Initiative** - which 27 African countries have joined so far - identifies gaps in rural transformation and matches countries with partners to deliver tangible results, supported by a geospatial data platform.
29. The **One Country One Priority Product Initiative** helps countries develop the value chain of special agro-products in ways that are inclusive, profitable, and environmentally sustainable.
30. The Initiative has been recently launched in Africa, and we invite African countries to take up this opportunity this year.
31. The **1000 Digital Villages Initiative** – currently being piloted in 7 African countries - puts digitalization at the core of rural transformation and prosperity.
32. For this, FAO is collaborating with the private sector and other partners to offer farmers a range of information services through digital and mobile channels.

33. The **Green Cities Initiative** aims to introduce innovative solutions to integrate agrifood systems, urban and peri-urban agriculture, and urban forestry into local planning for resilient and healthy cities.
34. We are already working in 20 cities in sub-Saharan Africa.
35. FAO has been working closely with the African Union's **Great Green Wall Initiative**, to restore African forests and landscapes.
36. And we are currently developing a large multi-country **Green Climate Fund programme** to provide further support.

Dear Colleagues,

37. All these initiatives are country driven and country owned, and **action at country level** is critical - it is in your hands.
38. **You must take the lead, and FAO will provide the support!**
39. To further increase and strengthen this support, FAO is also currently developing **two new thematic strategies**:
40. The **Strategy on Science and Innovation** will focus on how to better harness scientific evidence, technology and innovation across our work;
41. And the new **Strategy on Climate Change** will guide us on better addressing the impacts of the climate crisis on agrifood systems.
42. The inputs you have provided on both strategies, including during this week's **Senior Officers' Meeting**, have been fundamental.
43. This year Africa hosts **COP27** in Egypt, and the urgency to act on climate change has never been stronger.
44. Let us optimize COP27 to work together to drive the **global climate action agenda** to enhance resilience and adaptation across the Continent, and to transform Africa's agrifood systems.
45. We still have a lot of work to do, but we have also achieved many **successes** together.
46. The **Desert Locust Control Operations in eastern Africa** are an example of how FAO's technical leadership, together with solid collaboration from donors and government agencies, led to quick and effective action on the ground.

47. FAO's work on **land tenure**, together with government agencies and other stakeholders, is bearing fruit in the form of digitized land records, which have long-term benefits for **peace and gender equality**.
48. Our work in protracted crises in Africa adds an important **development** perspective to the humanitarian work, and contributes to peace.
49. We are bringing communities together to negotiate peaceful solutions on issues such as **land and water access**,
50. And we are assisting to serve **vulnerable rural families** in hard-to-reach areas, enabling farmers, herders and fishers to re-start to produce their own food, and not rely on humanitarian aid.
51. These and many other success stories are set out in the report "**FAO in Africa - Impacts in 2021**",
52. Which sets out examples of where FAO provided technical support to **mitigate the impacts of the pandemic** on agrifood systems; supported countries to adopt a **One Health** approach to prevent the next zoonotic pandemic; and provided a framework to boost **trade in agricultural commodities** and services under the African Continental Free Trade Area.
53. **Sharing knowledge and best practices is a theme of this Regional Conference.**
54. The FAO Regional Office for Africa just launched a new **Regional Technical Platform on Common Agricultural Policies and Practices**, which will continue to facilitate knowledge sharing among countries,
55. As well as to build on the strong **partnerships** with civil society organizations, academia and the private sector in Africa.

Dear Friends,

56. Africa has great potential for **change** due to its **rich natural resources**, and its large pool of **innovative young people**.
57. **You are here today as key leaders to drive this change.**
58. Let us be tall and strong like the *ceiba* tree, and continue to **work together efficiently, effectively and coherently**, and in a more **innovative** way for ***The Africa We Want!***
59. Thank you.