

MEETING OF AFRICAN MINISTERS FOR AGRICULTURE

DECLARATION ON FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

16 April 2020

FINAL

WE, the Ministers for Agriculture of the African Union Member States, convening virtually on 16 April 2020 with the support of the African Union Commission (AUC) Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO):

DEEPLY CONCERNED that the COVID-19 pandemic poses significant challenges to the already strained health, food and nutrition security and broad socio-economic conditions in Africa. The growing direct impact of the pandemic is affecting health, in terms of morbidity and mortality, quickly overburdening health care services with negative repercussions for non-COVID-19 related health problems. The decline in demand and production from the most economically developed countries where contagion had initially hit hardest is causing a global recession, with direct repercussions in Africa. With the spread of the virus in the continent, containment measures, including social distancing and lockdowns, closing of schools, the prohibition of public gatherings and the closure of non-essential businesses and economic activities, will have far-reaching consequences.

NOTING that as the COVID-19 pandemic reaches a growing number of communities across Africa, governments' efforts to contain the spread of the virus need to be accompanied by measures to minimize disruptions to

the food and agriculture systems and to support the livelihoods and food security of the most vulnerable. To date, the emerging crisis is viewed primarily through a public health lens (as it should), and only gradually are national strategies, task forces and funds focusing attention on the economic and food and nutrition security impacts. There are signs of emerging disruptions on the upstream and downstream links of the food and agriculture chains in countries that have implemented health measures to slow the spread of the virus.

FURTHER NOTING that the COVID-19 pandemic could exert a significant supply shock in the region. With food and agriculture systems being highly labour-intensive in most African countries, shortages of workers due to restrictions on people's and labour mobility may compromise the provision of inputs in upstream, farming activities and downstream trading, processing and transportation activities. This may be the case for all crops but especially for perishable horticulture products (such as vegetables, fruits, flowers) and meat and dairy products.

OBSERVING that dependence on extra-regional imports for food, in particular for the urban areas, makes African countries more vulnerable to disruptions in international logistics and distribution, in addition to production problems in other countries. This could result in food shortages and increases in food prices, particularly in countries highly dependent on food imports, as is the case of many low-income and landlocked countries and Small Island Developing States. These factors, combined with losses in consumer incomes, minimal savings and limited access to public safety nets, mean that COVID-19 also creates significant demand-side risks, particularly for the poor and vulnerable populations. Poor net food consumers in rural and especially in urban areas are in severe risk.

CONCERNED that these impacts further exacerbate a situation of already high rates of hunger, malnutrition and poverty due to challenges affecting rural areas, including the desert locust outbreak, fall armyworm impacts, droughts, conflict and insecurity. The disruption of traditional

transhumance patterns and the creation of new ones may lead to tensions, social unrest and local displacement and increased levels of poverty and food and nutrition insecurity.

COGNIZANT that the COVID-19 pandemic has, in particular, also exacerbated another major crisis of the desert locust outbreak that presents Africa with unprecedented threat to food security and livelihoods. As many people in Africa implement the COVID 19 preventive measures of social distancing, stay at home and lockdown, hundreds of billions of desert locusts are destroying their crops in the field. The combination of the locust infestation and COVID-19 could wipe out any hope of food security and put lives of entire populations, especially in Eastern Africa, at prolonged starvation and death, if urgent action is not taken to deal with the situation.

URGING governments to prioritize the food and agriculture system as an essential service that must continue to operate during periods of lockdown, emergency, curfew and other health containment measures. Agriculture and food marketing interventions must recognize that all types of food systems - modern, traditional (open markets, small stores) and informal (street vendors) - play critical roles in serving different markets and sustaining important parts of the population, thus helping to maintain a resilient food system imperative to minimizing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on people, the society and the economy.

CALLING UPON the UN agencies, multilateral development banks, donor countries and other partners to consider the emergency as urgent and step up and provide financial and other resources to help countries that do not have the resources to adequately respond to this crisis. Such support should aim to strengthen the health systems of these countries and make their food systems more resilient so that they can prevent a food security crisis from turning into a more serious humanitarian disaster.

APPRECIATING that despite these challenges, the region has also made important progress in terms of prioritizing social protection as a core component of poverty reduction and rural development strategies, including in the context of the CAADP Malabo Declaration. This is a critical moment to scale up these efforts.

RECOGNIZING that the COVID-19 pandemic is hitting Africa at a time when there are still protracted conflicts in some regions, the number of displaced people is at its highest (over 20 million), and when significant numbers of our children are malnourished and 20 percent of our fellow citizens are chronically hungry, with some in acute food insecurity.

CONSCIOUS that the prevailing food insecurity and malnutrition situation could compound the COVID-19 health situation of the affected populations.

APPRECIATING that sustainable development of agriculture and food systems in Africa has direct dividends in curbing the current negative influences on public health, youth unemployment, education, economic and social development, the resulting distress migration and tendencies to engage in illegal and socially disruptive activities.

HEREBY COMMIT OURSELVES TO:

- i) Ensuring that measures are in place to support the food security and nutrition for all and especially for the most vulnerable segment of our populations, with measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic while minimizing food system disruptions, simultaneously;
- ii) Providing adequate safety nets, including cash, food, and other relevant social protection measures to support all vulnerable population groups;

- iii) Ensuring that agricultural actors and activities at all levels, particularly harvests, are not severely affected by the unintended consequences of the containment measures and restrictions on movement, while keeping safe the work environment of producers, traders and workers;
- iv) Ensuring that as the outbreak unfolds, food and agriculture system activities are carefully monitored and assessed, and all engaging actors are timely and transparently informed and well advised to pursue their operations;
- v) Ensuring that farmers have timely access to quality equipment and crop inputs, including seeds and planting material this season;
- vi) Ensuring that livestock farmers, including pastoralists, and fish farmers have access to corresponding inputs, such as animal feeds and access to pasture as well as quality fish inputs to support the aquaculture industry;
- vii) Putting in place measures that will reduce food post-harvest losses and thus have more food available in the markets;
- viii) Addressing simultaneously, as governments with our partners, the double burden of COVID 19 and desert locusts, which, together, are challenges of grave magnitude that must be kept at the heart of the urgent work programme in Africa;
- ix) Working with local leaders to ensure that downstream and upstream food and agriculture markets and the informal food sector, remain open and operate properly, while complying with health and safety guidelines;
- x) Working with food and agriculture system traders and transporters, and officials in other sectors and local governments

to resolve any bottlenecks affecting the safe movement, transport and marketing of essential people, goods and services in the system.

- xi) Keeping the national borders open for food and agriculture commodity trade so as not to disrupt regional and interregional trade in food and agriculture products and inputs;
- xii) Ensuring adequate emergency strategic food reserves and storage facilities, including through public-private partnerships, where appropriate and feasible, and directly linked to the social protection programs;
- xiii) Guaranteeing the role of national leadership in advancing the food security and nutrition agenda to achieve concrete results, through putting in place pragmatic policies and strategies, mobilizing and allocating adequate resources, and enhancing institutional capacities and capabilities for accelerated implementation of sustainable food and agriculture systems in an integrated and coordinated manner, even during COVID-19 pandemic.
- xiv) Redoubling our efforts and concerted actions, in cooperation with all stakeholders, to ensure food security and nutrition for all our citizens during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and to enable meeting Africa's commitment to ending hunger by 2025.