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Unies pour l'alimentation
et l'agriculture

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Alimentación y la Agricultura

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الأغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

CONFERENCE

Forty-second Session

2021

**Report of the 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Africa
(26-28 October 2020)**



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**

REPORT

**Victoria Falls,
Zimbabwe**

**26-28 October
2020
(virtual)**

Thirty First Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa

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FAO Member Nations in the Africa Region

Algeria	Eritrea	Namibia
Angola	Ethiopia	Niger
Benin	Gabon	Nigeria
Botswana	Gambia	Rwanda
Burkina Faso	Ghana	Sao Tome and Principe
Burundi	Guinea	Senegal
Cameroon	Guinea-Bissau	Seychelles
Cabo Verde	Kenya	Sierra Leone
Central African Republic	Lesotho	Somalia
Chad	Liberia	South Africa
Comoros	Libya	South Sudan
Congo	Madagascar	The Sudan
Côte d'Ivoire	Malawi	Swaziland
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Mali	Togo
Djibouti	Mauritania	Tunisia
Egypt	Mauritius	Uganda
Equatorial Guinea	Morocco	United Republic of Tanzania
	Mozambique	Zambia
		Zimbabwe

Date and place of FAO Regional Conferences for Africa

First	Lagos, Nigeria, 3 – 12 November 1960
Second	Tunis, Tunisia, 1 – 10 November 1962
Third	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3 – 15 September 1964
Fourth	Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 9 – 19 November 1966
Fifth	Kampala, Uganda, 18 – 29 November 1968
Sixth	Algiers, Algeria, 17 September – 3 October 1970
Seventh	Libreville, Gabon, 14 – 30 September 1972
Eighth	Rose Hill, Mauritius, 1 – 17 August 1974
Ninth	Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2 – 12 November 1976
Tenth	Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, 18 – 28 September 1978
Eleventh	Lomé, Togo, 16 – 27 June 1980
Twelfth	Algiers, Algeria, 22 September – 2 October 1982
Thirteenth	Harare, Zimbabwe, 16 – 25 July 1984
Fourteenth	Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, 2 – 11 September 1986
Fifteenth	Moka, Mauritius, 26 April – 4 May 1988
Sixteenth	Marrakech, Morocco, 11 – 15 June 1990
Seventeenth	Accra, Ghana, 20 – 24 July 1992
Eighteenth	Gaborone, Botswana, 24 – 28 October 1994
Nineteenth	Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 16 – 20 April 1996
Twentieth	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 16 – 20 February 1998

Twenty-first	Yaoundé, Cameroon, 21 – 25 February 2000
Twenty-second	Cairo, Egypt, 4-8 February 2002
Twenty-third	Johannesburg, South Africa, 1 – 5 March 2004
Twenty-fourth	Bamako, Mali, 30 January – 3 February 2006
Twenty-fifth	Nairobi, Kenya, 16 – 20 June 2008
Twenty-sixth	Luanda, Angola, 3 – 7 May 2010
Twenty-seventh	Brazzaville, Congo, 23 – 27 April 2012
Twenty-eighth	Tunis, Tunisia, 24 – 28 March 2014
Twenty-ninth	Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 4 – 8 April 2016
Thirtieth	Khartoum, the Sudan, 19 – 23 February 2018
Thirty-first	Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 26 – 28 October 2020

SUMMARY OF MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

MATTERS REQUIRING THE ATTENTION OF THE COUNCIL

Programme and Budget Matters

- *Priorities for FAO Activities in Africa* (Paragraphs 43 and 44)
- *Decentralized Offices Network* (Paragraphs 46 and 47)

Other Matters

- *Multi-year Programme of Work for the Africa Regional Conference* (Paragraph 48)
- *Concluding Items List of Proposed Topics for the 32nd Regional Conference for Africa* (Paragraph 49)
- *Date and Place of the 32nd Regional Conference for Africa* (Paragraph 50)

MATTERS REQUIRING THE ATTENTION OF THE CONFERENCE

Regional and Global Policy Matters

- *COVID-19 and its Impact on Agri-food Systems, Food Security and Nutrition: Implications and Priorities for the Africa region* (Paragraphs 20 and 21)
- *FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: A New Approach to Combat Poverty and Hunger* (Paragraphs 24 and 25)
- *Building Resilient Food and Agriculture Systems in the Context of Overlapping Multiple Crises (Climate Extremes, Transboundary Pests and Diseases, Conflicts and Economic Downturns): Addressing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Africa* (Paragraphs 27 and 28).
- *Progress Made on FAO's Regional Programme in the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and towards Development of an Action Programme to Address Food Security and Nutrition Challenges in Landlocked Countries in Africa* (Paragraphs 32 and 33).
- *Actualizing Inclusive Food Systems Transformation in Africa through Leveraging Innovation and Digitalization: Toward 2021 UN Food Systems Summit* (Paragraphs 36 to 39)
- *The Role of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on Food Systems and Nutrition: How Can We Promote Cross-Sector Policy Convergence?* (Paragraph 41)

1. **Introductory Items**

A. Organization of the Regional Conference

1. The Thirty-first FAO Regional Conference for Africa (ARC) was held from 26 to 28 October 2020. The Session was convened virtually, on an exceptional basis, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health concerns and constraints. The Session followed consultations by the FAO Director-General Dr. QU Dongyu with the host Government of Zimbabwe and the Regional Group for Africa. As the General Rules of the Organization presuppose in-person sessions of the Regional Conference, the Members agreed to suspend any rules incompatible with the virtual setting. The Regional Conference included a Senior Officers Meeting, held on 26 October, and a ministerial-level Meeting held from 27 to 28 October 2020.

2. The Regional Conference was attended by 874 delegates from 48 Members. The delegates were constituted of 95 ministers (including 12 Deputy Ministers and two Ministers of Foreign Affairs) of 44 countries, 20 Ambassadors, 12 private sector organizations, 28 civil society and/or non-governmental organizations, 10 intergovernmental organizations, six United Nations (UN) organizations and four observer nations.

Inaugural Ceremonies

3. The Senior Officers Meeting was opened with addresses by The Honourable Anxious Jongwe Masuka, Minister for Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement of Zimbabwe; and Mr Abebe Haile-Gabriel, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative of FAO, Regional Office for Africa.

4. The Honourable Anxious Jongwe Masuka welcomed participants and highlighted the importance of the Regional Conference theme, “Promoting Inclusive Agribusiness and Regional Integration for the Attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals”, particularly in the context of the African Union 2063 Agenda, the 2014 Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation, and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

5. Mr. Abebe Haile-Gabriel welcomed participants and thanked the Republic of Zimbabwe for hosting and for its support in organizing the meeting. He acknowledged the support of the Chairperson of the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Africa, the Independent Chairperson of the Council and the Chairperson of the Africa Group of Permanent Representatives to FAO.

6. Mr Abebe Haile-Gabriel underlined the overlapping crises in Africa, compounded with the COVID-19 pandemic, which have debilitating impacts, pushing the region off-track on Malabo targets as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on eradicating poverty and ending hunger. He touched upon FAO’s ongoing transformation to better serve its Members and called for increased collaboration, partnerships and mutual accountability.

Election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, and Appointment of Rapporteur

7. Delegates endorsed The Honourable Anxious Jongwe Masuka, Minister for Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement of Zimbabwe to chair this Session. The Chairperson thanked delegates for electing Zimbabwe, and FAO for the excellent preparations in organizing the meeting. He requested Dr John Basera, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement of Zimbabwe to chair the Senior Officers Meeting.

8. The Regional Conference elected Equatorial Guinea as First Vice-Chair and Sudan as second Vice-Chair. The Conference appointed Ghana and Morocco as First and Second Rapporteurs, respectively.

Adoption of Agenda and Timetable

9. The Regional Conference adopted the Agenda, which is provided in Appendix A.

Statement by FAO Director-General

10. Dr QU Dongyu, the Director-General of FAO, highlighted the existing potential of the African continent for transforming agriculture and food systems, and indicated that current efforts represent an important premise for a brighter future (ARC/20/INF/4).

Statement by the Head of Government of Zimbabwe

11. His Excellency Emmerson D. Mnangagwa, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, officially opened the Ministerial Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa.

Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

12. Mr Khalid Mehboob, the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, delivered the statement which was made available to delegates (ARC/20/INF/5).

Statement by the Chairperson of the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Africa

13. His Excellency Abdelgadir Turkawi, Chairperson of the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Africa, delivered the statement which was made available to delegates (ARC/20/INF/6).

Statement by the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

14. Mr Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, delivered his message by video.

Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security

15. His Excellency Thanawat Tiensin, Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), reported on the progress made by the CFS over the past two years and its relevance to the Africa region. He briefed the Regional Conference on some of the key CFS activities. He exhorted Members to translate policy tools into concrete actions at regional and country levels (ARC/20/INF/7).

Statement of the African Union Commissioner

16. Her Excellency Josefa Sacko, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission, delivered her statement.

Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Organizations

17. Mr Hammadou Gordi, spokesperson of the Civil Society Organizations (CSO), presented the outcomes of the CSO consultation, which was held on the margin of the Regional Conference, in Zimbabwe on 25-27 February 2020. The statement is available on the Regional Conference webpage: (<http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/regional-conferences/arc31/documents/en/>). He renewed CSO engagement to farmers' rights and to develop solutions to common challenges.

Statement by the Spokesperson of the Private Sector

18. Ms Lucy Muchocki, CEO, Pan African Agribusiness and Agroindustry Consortium, delivered the statement on behalf of the Private Sector, which was developed through the Africa Agribusiness Leadership Dialogue held in Ghana on 2 March 2020. The statement is available on the Regional Conference webpage. She called for regular dialogue to address issues on trade, finance and innovation in African agribusiness and for momentum to be kept in order to develop practical and action-oriented solutions.

II. Regional and Global Policy Matters

A. COVID-19 and its Impact on Agri-food Systems, Food Security and Nutrition: Implications and Priorities for the Africa Region

19. The Regional Conference reviewed the document on COVID-19 and its Impact on Agri-food Systems, Food Security, and Nutrition: Implications and Priorities for the Africa Region (ARC/20/3).

20. The Regional Conference:

- i. Appreciated FAO's leadership in bringing the African Union Commission (AUC), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), civil society organizations, the private sector, and other stakeholders together in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Africa region;
- ii. Acknowledged that COVID-19 presents several challenges and uncertainties but offers opportunities to bring FAO's knowledge and technical expertise to shape, support and influence Africa's response now and beyond the pandemic;
- iii. Welcomed the FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, which aims to promote strategic investments to avert further crises, prevent the health crisis from becoming a food crisis, increase resilience to shocks, and accelerate the rebuilding and sustainable transformation of our food systems;
- iv. Acknowledged the special needs of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) as a group worst affected by the impact of COVID-19 and tailor the response and recovery support to the prevailing situation; and
- v. Acknowledged the efforts made by development partners in mobilizing new resources and re-orienting ongoing programmes and projects to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 as well as the need to explore new avenues of resources mobilization by working with the private sector.

21. The Regional Conference recommended that FAO:

- i. Continue its support to Members to strengthen their response to COVID-19 in the key areas, including by ensuring that the national response plan include response to and recovery of the agriculture and food systems;
- ii. Consider the emerging priorities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in supporting Members to mitigate the significant threat that this virus represents to ending extreme poverty and eradicating hunger in Africa. Specifically, the Regional Conference recommended that FAO:
 - a. Support Members in the socio-economic impact assessments to measure the impact of COVID-19 on food security, nutrition, and functioning of food systems;
 - b. Support Members to make nutritious foods available and affordable by designing and implementing interventions that draw from recommendations in the SOFI 2020 report;
 - c. Provide support to establish and promote multisectoral approaches for addressing food security and nutrition;
 - d. Support countries to design and implement more efficient, cost-effective and innovative social protection programmes, including adjusting programme design, management tools, and delivery systems with the view that these programmes should be positioned and guided

- within national social protection system frameworks that promote long-term household resilience;
- e. Continue to support governments and private sector institutions to enable policy reforms, mechanisms, and capacity-building measures adapted to the needs of agri-food enterprises along food value chains to ensure improved food security and nutrition;
- f. Support the efforts of the AUC, African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, Members and other stakeholders in the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement; and
- 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, as well as promote risk-based programming and decision-making;
- iii. Support Members and RECs to seize opportunities for accelerating innovation and digitization;
- iv. Translate into practical action the political declarations made at the joint virtual meeting of Ministers in charge of Agriculture in African countries on the impact of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition, held on 16 April 2020.

22. The Regional Conference urged Members to implement the recommendations of the tripartite ministerial meeting held on 27 July 2020.

B. FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: A New Approach to Combat Poverty and Hunger

23. The Regional Conference considered the document, “FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: A New Approach (ARC/20/2 Rev.1)”, which discusses how to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development to eradicate poverty (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1), and end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2).

24. The Regional Conference:

- i. Welcomed the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative through which FAO will support evidence-based, country-led and country-owned investment plans and actions in the region, building on national priorities;
- ii. Appreciated the focus on accelerating inclusive agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development to eradicate poverty (SDG 1), hunger, and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2). In doing so, these efforts will contribute to the attainment of all the other SDGs in the region;
- iii. Recognized the role that the Hand-in-Hand Initiative can play to revitalize support to country-led and country-owned actions, identifying regions and territories where inclusive and innovative sustainable development of agriculture and agri-food value chains can generate the highest impacts to end poverty and hunger;
- iv. Welcomed the flexible and innovative matchmaking approach to building and fostering partnerships that strengthen resource mobilization, including in-kind contributions as well as finance and investment facilitation to accelerate progress toward achievement of national sustainable development priorities for food and agriculture;
- v. Recognized the importance of strengthening national capacities for improved data collection, analysis, and communication to recognize and assign quantitative values to interactions, interdependencies, and trade-offs among policy options as well as programme and targeting priorities that inform Hand-in-Hand Initiative programme design aimed to address multiple objectives under the 2030 Agenda;
- vi. Underscored the utility of improved analytics to enable better-informed decision-making for investment, innovation, and policy and institutional change that promote inclusive, sustainable gender and youth-sensitive agri-food system development;

- vii. Acknowledged the importance of sharing knowledge and technology on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) between countries within the overarching scope of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative;
- viii. Noted that the Malabo Declaration's commitments and targets are echoed in the SDGs, particularly SDG 2 (end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture);
- ix. Noted the important role the Hand-in-Hand Initiative can play in increasing production and productivity in agriculture, food security and nutrition;
- x. Further noted that the Hand-in-Hand Initiative can help countries to foster progress towards achieving the Malabo declaration's targets as well as to comply with its biennial reporting and accountability requirements;
- xi. Noted also that, in addition to the priority countries selected so far, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative is inclusive, transparent and open to all Members; and
- xii. Appreciated the experiences shared by some pilot countries (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe) in implementing the Initiative.

25. The Regional Conference recommended that FAO:

- i. Support the strengthening of national and regional institutional and technical capacities for knowledge and data generation and management that support evidence-based planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning;
- ii. Support Members to put in place well coordinated and efficient data collection and management systems through the Initiative, including indicators developed to measure progress in the implementation of the Malabo Declaration and the SDGs;
- iii. Promote the fact that there are significant convergences among most of the indicators developed to measure progress in the implementation of the Malabo Declaration and the SDG indicators;
- iv. Promote effective public and private partnerships inclusive of small-scale producers, as an essential factor leading to the achievement of results that transform lives and promote sustainable landscapes;
- v. Consider ways to enhance and extend the Hand-in-Hand Initiative approach to strengthen FAO country support to achieve other FAO priority objectives, working in alignment with UN country team priorities and, in particular, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated impacts;
- vi. Set up a dedicated component to assist beneficiaries of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative to digitalize and deploy appropriate technologies in agriculture and all food systems; and
- vii. Encourage experience-sharing among participating countries of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative.

C. Building Resilient Food and Agriculture Systems in the Context of Overlapping Multiple Crises (Climate Extremes, Transboundary Pests and Diseases, Conflicts and Economic Downturns): Addressing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Africa

26. The Regional Conference considered the document on Building Resilient Food and Agriculture Systems in the Context of Overlapping Multiple Crises (Climate Extremes, Transboundary Pests and Diseases, Conflicts and Economic Downturns): Addressing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Africa (ARC/20/4 Rev.1). The Regional Conference discussed the rise of both chronic and acute food insecurity and persistent malnutrition in Africa in recent years, driven by the combined impacts of climate variability and extremes, conflict, and economic slowdowns and downturns.

27. The Regional Conference:
- i. Recognized the peculiar challenges faced by the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS including geographic remoteness, open access to the sea, high transport and transit costs, vulnerability to climate shocks, reliance on international trade, low trade integration, challenging logistics, food systems not integrated into regional or global economy;
 - ii. Recognized that climate variability and extremes, conflict, and economic slowdowns have driven the rise of chronic and acute food insecurity and persistent malnutrition in Africa in recent years;
 - iii. Concerned that the transboundary pests and diseases in particular the desert locusts and Africa migratory red locust outbreaks in east and southern Africa, and the effect of COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbate the deteriorating food security situation in Africa;
 - iv. Highlighted that floods is an important driver and stressed the need to invest more including in the blue economy;
 - v. Acknowledged that the collaboration among humanitarian, development, and peace actors espousing humanitarian-development-peace nexus approaches could highlight the wide range of risks people face and acknowledge the interlinkages between climate and human-made risks;
 - vi. Stressed that efforts are needed to forecast and prevent conflicts and take anticipative measures to mitigate their impact on food security;
 - vii. Highlighted the importance of the private sector in building resilience in African vulnerable contexts, notably in SIDS and LLDCs; and
 - viii. Noted the highly political issues addressed in the document.

28. The Regional Conference recommended that FAO:

- i. Reinforce its priorities on investments and partnerships for integrated, comprehensive and innovative approaches and systems towards building resilience, including through holistic social protection schemes, across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus, to enable shifting from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending the need for it, by reducing risks and vulnerabilities, and supporting prevention efforts;
- ii. Ensure more deliberate and consistent integration of conflict-sensitive approaches, and enhance local capacities for peace, along with investment into how to address the complexity and needs of vulnerable groups during both their daily lives and during crises;
- iii. Emphasize stronger collaboration while focusing on achieving collective outcomes to address the vulnerability and risks facing communities in crisis-prone countries;
- iv. Emphasize the importance of including all sub-sectors of agriculture in interventions to build resilience;
- v. Strengthen capacities of countries in the resilience of food and agricultural systems in the context of crises, particularly extreme weather events, transboundary pests and diseases, conflicts and economic recessions;
- vi. Review its programmes to adapt to the current market contexts by the global economic and health crisis induced by COVID-19;
- vii. Work with FAO Members of the AUC and discuss the highly political issues of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus; and
- viii. Create a continental platform for food security and information system for use by countries.

29. The Regional Conference invited Development Partners to:

- i. Consider further integrating humanitarian assistance with longer-term development support (including food and agriculture) through multi-year planning processes, a multisectoral set of interventions, and longer-term donor commitments to address all forms of malnutrition, in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

30. The Regional Conference recommended that governments:
- i. Invest strategically to strengthen countries' and people's resilience to shocks, with a greater focus on reducing dependence on a few commodities and spatial inequalities, investing in a diversified economy, and promoting inclusive structural transformation, which is key for longer-term social stability and broad, inclusive growth;
 - ii. Strengthen international and regional partnerships similar to the Global Network Against Food Crises, that are vital to manage and reduce risks in the face of climate variability and extremes, which themselves can contribute to conflict by undermining livelihoods, food security and nutrition;
 - iii. Increase their support and contributions to the Africa Solidarity Trust Fund for building resilience and a sustainable agriculture and food systems transformation for food security and nutrition; and
 - iv. Adopt new approaches to fight poverty and hunger, in particular the the promotion of investments particularly within the framework of public-private cooperation;

D. Progress Made on FAO's Regional Programme in the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and towards Development of an Action Programme to Address Food Security and Nutrition Challenges in Land-locked Countries in Africa

31. The Regional Conference reviewed the document on "Towards Development of an Action Programme to Address Food Security and Nutrition Challenges in Land-locked Countries in Africa" (ARC/20/5) and examined the progress made on the Global Action Programme (GAP) for Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the Africa Region.

32. The Regional Conference:

- i. Welcomed FAO's establishment of the Office for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Land-locked Developing Countries (LLDCs);
- ii. Recognized that the LLDC economies are less diversified and more vulnerable to various types of shocks, despite the potential they have to increase agriculture production and productivity; and
- iii. Acknowledged that the Hand-in-Hand Initiative is an opportunity for the SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs towards addressing their food security and nutrition challenges.

33. The Regional Conference recommended that FAO:

- i. Support and strengthen the collaboration among land-locked African countries and their respective transit neighbours, including the formulation of policy priorities and investments for enhanced food security and trade;
- ii. Strengthen coherence in supporting land-locked countries in Africa, considering their vulnerability to address unique and complex food security and nutrition challenges;
- iii. Support LLDCs to put mechanisms in place and harness public and private investment in agriculture, food security, and nutrition to capitalize on the existing potentials;
- iv. Assist LLDCs to proactively and meaningfully address their food security and nutrition challenges through regional and continental initiatives, for example, the African Continental Free Trade Area, Programme on Infrastructure Development in Africa, and Africa Climate Smart Agriculture Vision 25X25;
- v. Pay special attention to the Atlantic and Indian Ocean SIDS component of the GAP; and
- vi. Scale-up assistance to SIDS to facilitate private sector involvement in food security and nutrition in the region.

34. The Regional Conference encouraged:
- i. Members to increase focus on and engagement with land-locked African countries within the framework of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, based on the good practices of FAO's Regional Programme in SIDS;
 - ii. Members to implement proactive policies to improve the business and regulatory environment, strengthen institutions, and promote inclusive investments for building competitiveness in food and agriculture;
 - iii. Partners to allocate adequate resources to the Atlantic, and Indian Ocean SIDS to address the priorities of the Programme; and
 - iv. Interact with regional economic bodies such as the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

E. Actualizing Inclusive Food Systems Transformation in Africa through Leveraging Innovation and Digitalization: Toward 2021 UN Food Systems Summit

35. The Regional Conference considered the documents on Actualizing Inclusive Food Systems Transformation in Africa through Leveraging Innovation and Digitalization: Toward 2021 UN Food Systems Summit (ARC/20/6; ARC/20/7).

36. The Regional Conference:

- i. Acknowledged that transformation of food and agriculture for sustainable development requires addressing agricultural productivity that will deliver safe, nutritious and affordable food in an inclusive manner that is balanced with efficient and sustainable natural resource management;
- ii. Acknowledged the importance of technology and innovation as an accelerator for food systems transformation;
- iii. Noted the progress made in the preparation of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit ;
- iv. Endorsed FAO's "Five Principles of the Common Vision for Sustainable Food and Agriculture":
 - a. Increase productivity, employment and value addition in food systems for improved nutrition and healthy diets;
 - b. Protect and enhance natural resources;
 - c. Improve livelihoods and foster inclusive economic growth;
 - d. Enhance the resilience of people, communities, and ecosystems; and
 - e. Adapt governance to new challenges;
- v. Appreciated FAO's effort to establish and maintain the SDGs reporting mechanisms and tools, to strengthen national statistics offices, particularly given their expanded role to monitor and report on the SDG indicators and support the FAO Hand-in-Hand Initiative;
- vi. Acknowledged the need for sustainable development of agricultural value chains through collaboration across disciplines and sectors, and within and between countries to address the emerging challenges and opportunities in food systems for improved nutrition;
- vii. Considered the potential benefits and challenges arising from the establishment of an International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture at FAO, and assessed its relevance for the development of digital solutions for Africa;
- viii. Welcomed the new office for innovation and stressed the importance of innovation for food and agriculture to accelerate the transformation of food systems and achieve the SDGs, especially SDG 2 on eliminating hunger and all forms of malnutrition;
- ix. Welcomed the promotion of knowledge exchange and best practices between countries to support agriculture technologies, digital innovations, and related enabling policies;

- x. Recognized the importance of data and information systems to transform food systems and support healthy diets;
- xi. Acknowledged that food systems transformation needs to include digitalization that is sensitive and respectful of local cultural agricultural practices and attracts young people;
- xii. Endorsed the need to include youth in achieving the SDGs and food security, with interventions involving fisheries, aquaculture and livestock; and
- xiii. Appreciated the importance of inclusivity of youth, academic and research institutions at national level to achieve food systems transformation.

37. The Regional Conference recommended that FAO:

- i. Assist Members of FAO, in collaboration with the African Union and its institutions, to best integrate sustainable food and agriculture into national investment and strategic action plans, cross-sectoral coordination of activities, and use the guide “Transforming Food and Agriculture to Achieve the SDGs: 20 Interconnected Actions to Guide Decision Makers” as a roadmap to support transformation, and promoting nutrition-sensitive food systems;
- ii. Strengthen assistance to countries in agriculture (crops, livestock, forestry, and fisheries) through promoting innovations and broadening their access to small-scale producers, integrated policy support and multisectoral approaches;
- iii. Promote, diversify and strengthen cooperation with regional bodies, international financial institutions, public and private partners for long-term investments, innovative solutions and systems to achieve the SDGs and support the broader 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit;
- iv. Affirm, in the run up to the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, through a process of the UN Member States and stakeholder consultation, the centrality of food systems to the sustainable development agenda and the urgency of investing in more sustainable food systems;
- v. Propose action by FAO intergovernmental bodies to align UN Member States and stakeholders around a standard definition of food systems and a practical framework for concerted action to realize the potential of food systems transformation as a driver for achievement of the SDGs;
- vi. Develop strengthened evidence and tools for improved measurement, analysis, and management of trade-offs in specific contexts by providing open data-sharing platforms for modelling and analysis, and rolling out data systems and technologies to local communities and small-scale farmers;
- vii. Accelerate multistakeholder action to transform food systems to ensure that the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit provides the opportunity to endorse effective and intensified action, including scaled-up investment and innovation and rapid dissemination of experience and knowledge based on increased science-based policy dialogue and networks;
- viii. Support governments and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen innovation capacity in all its dimensions, including promoting new institutions, inclusive policies, practices, innovative financing and risk-sharing mechanisms, market information systems and technologies to support inclusive agriculture and food systems transformation;
- ix. Continue to support the strengthening of strategic partnerships and platforms, and establishing systems to enhance trade and regional integration;
- x. Increase interagency collaboration to support sustainable food system development that will facilitate trade and market access, in line with the United Nations Development System (UNDS) repositioning principles.
- xi. Consider how to undertake a systemic transformation of food systems to make it attractive to both young people and small holder farmers.

38. The Regional Conference recommended that the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit respond to five questions:

- i. How do we strengthen Africa's agricultural research to generate more science, knowledge and information needed to transform food systems involving universities and research institutions;
- ii. What role agricultural councils and other national bodies could play in bringing technical and policy advice to ensure technological innovation, digitalization and access to markets at local level;
- iii. How to support a strong private sector engagement and which type of private sector is needed to enable food sovereignty and economic growth;
- iv. How to accelerate the transformation process for family farms; and
- v. How to develop agroecological approaches that are evidence- and science based, for the restoration of the natural resource base (water, land, forestry, fisheries, etc.).

39. Cognizant of the particular importance of digitalization for the transformation of food systems, the Regional Conference requested that FAO:

- i. Provide support to Members to develop a digital agriculture (e-agriculture) strategy for their respective sustainable development objectives;
- ii. Promote policy-level interventions to tap into private sector investment and innovations in digital agriculture to extend the benefits of digital technologies to small and family farmers through a win-win public-private-people partnership approach;
- iii. Create data standards and operation procedures for data collection, verification, synchronization and sharing for the agriculture sector to help Members integrate isolated digital agriculture systems, develop cross-sectoral digital solutions, and create a digital agriculture index or scoreboard; and
- iv. Support the creation of regional Digital Agriculture and Innovation Hubs as a think tank and incubator for digital agriculture innovation and experimentation in the region for a sustainable and competitive digital ecosystem.

F. The Role of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on Food Systems and Nutrition: How Can We Promote Cross-Sector Policy Convergence?

40. The Regional Conference reviewed the recent developments and deliberations of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and considered its Multi-Year Programme of Work and appropriate follow-up actions in the Africa region (ARC/20/9).

41. The Regional Conference:

- i. Recognized the unique multistakeholder nature of the CFS in fostering right to food and in shaping food systems to respond to shocks as we are seeing with the COVID-19 pandemic;
- ii. Committed to supporting the national and regional implementation of CFS policy instruments;
- iii. Recognized the importance of the ongoing policy convergence process on Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition as an essential reference document to address food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms within a food systems perspective in the coming years;
- iv. Invited Members to engage actively in the implementation of the CFS MYPOW 2020-2023.
- v. Welcomed the positive contribution of Voluntary Guidelines of Responsible Governance of Tenure in countries and strengthening multi-sectoral institutional frameworks in support of food systems transformation;

- vi. Recognized the importance of the guidelines in strengthening private sector engagement in transforming food systems;
- vii. Invited the CFS to revitalize its work and knowledge products to make them relevant and applicable for regional and country-level policy-making and programme implementation;
- viii. Invited countries to be members of the CFS and to reinforce collective action for fighting hunger and malnutrition in all its forms.
- ix. Recognized the importance of implementing voluntary guidelines as they serve as an institutional platform for collaboration and promoting synergy among inter-ministerial sectors and non-governmental stakeholders;
- x. Emphasized the importance of finalizing the Voluntary Guidelines for Food Systems and Nutrition as an important input to the UN Food Systems Summit; and
- xi. Invited FAO to support implementation of guidelines which respond to nutritional challenges and national context.

III. Programme and Budget Matters

A. Results and Priorities for FAO in the Africa Region

42. The Regional Conference considered the document on Results and Priorities for FAO in the Africa Region (ARC/20/8) covering achievements in 2018-19 and proposals for 2020-21 and beyond, including feedback on subregional priorities and Africa region.

43. The Regional Conference:

- i. Recognized the importance of FAO's Strategic Framework in providing direction for FAO's technical work and noted the arrangements regarding the proposed revision of the Strategic Framework to be submitted to the FAO Conference in July 2021;
- ii. Welcomed FAO's continuing efforts to develop a strategy for private sector partnerships in line with UN best practices and standard frameworks and guidance documents;
- iii. Affirmed the critical importance of actions and investments towards more sustainable food systems to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda;
- iv. Acknowledged the need for improved frameworks and decision-making tools to guide interventions in support of more sustainable food systems;
- v. Appreciated the decision of the United Nations Secretary-General to convene a Food Systems Summit in 2021 and provide guidance on the Summit's objectives and its expected outcomes;
- vi. Appreciated the substantial potential of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2) with a focus on enhancing agricultural productivity to improve nutrition, raising rural living standards, and contributing to global economic growth in accordance with FAO's mandate;
- vii. Recognized the importance of empowering SIDS communities to reshape their food systems to boost nutrition and to strengthen their resilience to climate and economic shocks;
- viii. Noted the importance of adopting innovative approaches and using modern science and technologies, including digital solutions to face new situations and challenges;
- ix. Stressed the importance of strengthened partnerships towards improved food security and nutrition, and agriculture and rural development, in the context of the SDGs;
- x. Recognized the importance of food systems transformations that embody the dynamic links across sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food, nutrition and resilience;
- xi. Noted the importance of strengthened partnerships, including with smallholder producers and multinational food companies, procurers, and consumers, as also highlighted in the 46th Session of the Committee on World Food Security;

- xii. Recognized the importance of FAO's work at the regional and country-level to address multifaceted development challenges and provide efficient and effective support to countries on the SDGs;
- xiii. Noted the importance of ensuring FAO's technical expertise is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the context of United Nations Development System repositioning;
- xiv. Highlighted the critical role of FAO with regards to relevant normative and standard-setting work such as voluntary guidelines and legal instruments, at country and regional levels; and
- xv. Appreciated the work completed and the results achieved by FAO in the 2018-19 biennium under the Regional Initiatives and other main areas of work in responding to the main priorities identified at the 30th Session of the Regional Conference.

44. The Regional Conference recommended that FAO:

- i. Reiterate the continued significance of the three Regional Initiatives, namely Ending Hunger by 2025; Sustainable Intensification of Production and Value Chain Development; and Building Resilience in Africa's Drylands, in driving the priority areas for Africa;
- ii. Refine the regional priorities in the context of new initiatives such as inclusive food systems transformation, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, digitalization and Innovation, the COVID-19 Response and Recovery programme as well as the UN Development System repositioning;
- iii. Elaborate and strengthen a regional work programme to provide technical assistance to African FAO Members under the coordination of the responsible AU institutions and RECs in the implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), including strengthening of food safety standards, among others;
- iv. Recognize and support the important role that the AfCFTA can play in enhancing FAO work in food security and nutrition, as well as food systems;
- v. Elaborate/strengthen its work programme on climate change, biodiversity and sustainable natural resources management, especially land degradation, desertification, floods, etc., building on flagship programmes such as the Great Green Wall, Green cities, etc.
- vi. Strengthen coherence in supporting SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs, considering their vulnerability to unique and complex food security and nutrition challenges;
- vii. Promote knowledge-sharing and scaling-up of best practices, technologies and innovative approaches, including data analytics, geo-spatial platform and digital solutions, to inform policies and investments that accelerate agricultural transformation and food systems development to eradicate poverty, end hunger and all forms of malnutrition, and the attainment of other SDGs;
- viii. Ensure policies are integrated and coordinated to harness synergies at sectoral levels and attain coherence at continental level, thus supporting countries to achieve food sovereignty; and
- ix. Support countries to scale up evidence-based successful projects and programmes.

B. Decentralized Offices Network

45. The Regional Conference considered the document on Decentralized Offices Network (ARC/20/10), reporting on actions taken in 2018-19 and those planned for 2020-21. The Regional Conference expressed its satisfaction with the implementation of decisions of the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Africa and the progress made in the decentralization of the FAO country office network.

46. The Regional Conference:

- i. Appreciated FAO's efforts towards increasing delegation of authority and decentralizing decision-making in administrative and programmatic areas, including human resources and procurement, with the aim to improve overall delivery of the strategic programmes and respond to the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda;

- ii. Acknowledged FAO's continued engagement in the implementation of the UN Development System repositioning at regional and country levels;
 - iii. Recognized that the recently established Offices for: Innovation; Emergencies and Resilience; Climate Change; Biodiversity and Environment; Sustainable Development Goals; Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Land-locked Developing Countries (LLDCs) – approved at the 164th Session of the FAO Council held in July 2020 – will play a key role in rolling out FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative in priority countries, such as SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs.
47. The Regional Conference recommended that FAO:
- i. Ensure full implementation of all the recommendations made on this subject at the 30th Session of the Regional Conference held in Sudan;
 - ii. Continue efforts to strengthen its technical capacities and policy integration at regional and subregional levels;
 - iii. Ensure leadership in the region across relevant SDGs, (including those under FAO's custodianship), with special attention to addressing hunger and poverty in the most needy and vulnerable countries;
 - iv. Shift towards a full programmatic approach at decentralized level and set more tangible programmatic objectives to demonstrate better its valuable contributions to the SDG achievements in line with recommendations of the Evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework;
 - v. Pursue the adjustment of its decentralized offices business models, in particular in light of the UN Development System repositioning, in order to ensure greater flexibility and efficiency in the use of the Organization's existing limited financial and human resources, aiming to respond to Members' emerging needs and priorities in line with the SDGs;
 - vi. Evaluate, identify and seize emerging opportunities arising from UN Development System repositioning at country and regional levels, building on lessons learned and successful experiences in collaboration with other partners, especially in the Rome-based Agencies (RBA) environment;
 - vii. Ensure that the recently established Office for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and Land-locked Developing Countries (LLDCs):
 - a. brings technical departments and divisions, technical experts and decentralized offices together to strengthen the impact of programmes in the priority countries;
 - b. engages with external actors and partners, including Members, the private sector and UN partners to mobilize resources and/or complement interventions in areas beyond the Organization's mandate or capacity, and to facilitate the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative in SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs;
 - viii. Increase the visibility, presence and capacity of FAO in the region to demonstrate impact, influence relevant policy processes, dialogues and agendas from the country, subregional, regional and global levels;
 - ix. Reconsider the skills and competency mix needed to improve programme delivery, and the collaboration, coordination and communication model between country, subregional, regional and headquarters offices to enable smoother synergies and linkages between them to deliver on the complex mandate of the Regional Office for Africa collectively;
 - x. Streamline and decentralize processes, especially for sourcing, deploying and managing talents and for procuring goods and services in a timely and effective way right where they are needed; and
 - xi. Strengthen stakeholder engagement and partnership building; improve resource mobilization, strategic communication, policy analysis and facilitation of policy development/reform; and learn to manage diversity of backgrounds, disciplines, geographical and technical expertise, languages, areas of development and policy work for greater effectiveness.

IV. Other Matters

A. Multi-year Programme of Work for the Africa Regional Conference

48. The Regional Conference took note of the Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2020-2023 for the FAO Regional Conference for Africa (ARC/20/13) presented to the Regional Conference for information.

B. Concluding Items

List of Proposed Topics for the 32nd Regional Conference for Africa

49. Based on the outcomes of the Subregional Consultations and the priorities presented to the Representatives, the Secretariat will liaise with the Africa Regional Group and come up with a suggested topic for the next Regional Conference for Africa.

Date and Place of the 32nd Regional Conference for Africa

50. The Regional Conference agreed to hold the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference for Africa in Equatorial Guinea in 2022. The exact date will be agreed jointly by the host country and the Secretariat of the Regional Conference.

C. Any Other Matters

Ministerial Session

51. The Ministerial Session was held on 27 and 28 October 2020 and focused on the following themes:

- COVID-19 and its Impact on Agrifood Systems, Food Security and Nutrition: Implications and Priorities for the Africa region
- FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: A New Approach to Combat Poverty and Hunger
- Actualizing Inclusive Food Systems Transformation in Africa through Leveraging Innovation and Digitalization: Toward 2021 UN Food Systems Summit
- The Role of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on Food Systems and Nutrition: How Can We Promote Cross-Sector Policy Convergence?

52. A special event was organized to launch the FAO-AUC joint report on “Africa Regional Outlook on Gender and Agrifood Systems”.

Adoption of the Report and the Ministerial Declaration

53. The Conference unanimously adopted the report and the Ministerial Declaration (Appendix C) as presented by the Rapporteur.

Closure of the Regional Conference

54. In his closing statement, the Director-General of FAO Dr Qu Dongyu congratulated the participants for the high level of participation and constructive debates. He expressed his appreciation for their reaffirmation to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and urged them to continue to bring all partners on board in an era of technology, preparing now for the solution for tomorrow.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Agenda

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, and Appointment of the Rapporteur

Adoption of Agenda and Timetable

Statement by the Director-General

Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

Statement by the Chairperson of the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Africa

Statement by the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

Statement by the African Union Commission

Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Organizations

Statement by the Spokesperson of the Private Sector

Video: Africa Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF)

II. REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POLICY AND REGULATORY MATTERS

Building Resilient Food and Agriculture Systems in the Context of Overlapping Multiple Crises (COVID-19, Climate Extremes, Transboundary Pests and Diseases, Conflicts and Economic Downturns): Addressing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Africa

Progress on FAO's Regional Programme in the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Towards Development of an Action Programme to Address Food Security and Nutrition Challenges in Landlocked Countries (LLCs) in Africa

III. PROGRAMME AND BUDGET MATTERS

Results and Priorities for FAO in the Africa Region, including feedback on Subregional Priorities and Africa Region Synthesis Report 2014-2019

Decentralized Offices Network

IV. OTHER MATTERS

Multi-year Programme of Work 2020-2023 for the Regional Conference for Africa

Date and Place of the 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Africa

Any Other Matters

MINISTERIAL SESSIONS

COVID-19 and Its Impact on Agri-food Systems, Food Security and Nutrition: Implications and Priorities for the Africa Region

FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: A New Approach to Combat Poverty and Hunger

Actualizing Inclusive Food Systems Transformation in Africa through Leveraging Innovation and Digitalization: Toward UN Food Systems Summit 2021

The Role of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on Food Systems and Nutrition: How Can We Promote Cross-Sector Policy Convergence?

Launch of the Report on Africa Regional Outlook on Gender and Agrifood Systems

Review and endorsement of the Report and the Ministerial Declaration of the Regional Conference

Appendix B. List of documents

SESSION DOCUMENTS

Number	Title
ARC/20/1 Rev. 1	Provisional Annotated Agenda
ARC/20/2 Rev. 1	FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: A New Approach
ARC/20/3 (New document)	COVID-19 and its Impact on Agrifood Systems, Food Security and Nutrition: Implications and Priorities for the Africa Region
ARC/20/4 Rev. 1	Building Resilient Food and Agriculture Systems in the Context of COVID-19, Climate Change, Conflicts, Economic Downturns and Locusts: Addressing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Africa
ARC/20/5	Towards Development of an Action Programme to Address Food Security and Nutrition Challenges in Landlocked Countries in Africa
ARC/20/6	Transforming Food and Agriculture Systems to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals
ARC/20/7	Innovations and Digitalization to Achieve SDGs
ARC/20/8	Results and Priorities for FAO in the Africa Region
ARC/20/8 WA1	Overview of FAO's Strategic Objectives Programme
ARC/20/8 WA2	Contribution of Results in the Africa Region to FAO Strategic Objectives in the 2018-19 Biennium
ARC/20/8 WA3	FAO Country Planning and Programming in the Context of Repositioning the United Nations Development System
ARC/20/8 WA4	Corporate Outcome Assessment 2019 - Regional Results for Africa
ARC/20/8 WA5	Update on the Development of the New Strategic Framework
ARC/20/9	The Role of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on Food Systems and Nutrition: How Can We Promote Cross-Sector Policy Convergence?
ARC/20/10	Decentralized Offices Network
ARC/20/11	Africa Region Synthesis of Evaluations 2014-2019
ARC/20/13	Multi-year Programme of Work 2020-2023 for the Regional Conference for Africa

INFORMATION DOCUMENTS

Symbol	Title
ARC/20/INF/1 Rev. 1	Information Note
ARC/20/INF/2 Rev. 1	Provisional Timetable
ARC/20/INF/3 Rev. 1	Provisional List of Documents
ARC/20/INF/4	Statement by the Director-General
ARC/20/INF/5	Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council
ARC/20/INF/6	Statement by the Chairperson of the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Africa
ARC/20/INF/7	Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)
ARC/20/INF/8	Summary Report of Recommendations of FAO Regional Statutory Bodies (statistics, forestry/wildlife, fisheries)
ARC/20/INF/9	Reporting on the Recommendations of the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Africa
ARC/20/INF/10 (New document)	Concept Note on the COVID-19 Impact on African Agriculture and Food Security Systems: Best Practices and Priorities
ARC/20/INF/11 Rev. 1	Taking Stock on Status of the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems for Nutrition
ARC/20/INF/12 Rev. 3	Concept Note on Hand-in-Hand Initiative: A New Approach to Combat Poverty and Hunger
ARC/20/INF/13 Rev. 3	Concept Note on Actualizing Inclusive Food Systems Transformation in Africa, through Leveraging Innovation and Digitalization: Toward UN Food Systems Summit 2021
ARC/20/INF/14 Rev. 1	United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021
ARC/20/INF/15	Outcomes of the Africa Food Security Leadership Dialogue
ARC/20/INF/17	United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition and Follow-up to the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2)
ARC/20/INF/18	Update of the Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition
ARC/20/INF/19	Food Loss and Waste Measurement Linked to Food Loss Analysis Methodology

ARC/20/INF/21	Outcomes of Africa Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF) Round Table of Contributors (11 June 2019 Malabo, Equatorial Guinea)
ARC/20/INF/22	International Year of Plant Health
ARC/20/INF/23	Progress Made on the Global Action Programme (GAP) for Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of Africa Region

Appendix C. Ministerial Declaration

Declaration of Ministers and Heads of Delegations on National, Sub-regional and Regional Commitments for Food Systems Transformation, Innovation and Digitalization in African Agriculture

We, the Ministers of Agriculture, Rural Development, Livestock, Fisheries and Forestry and Environment and Heads of Delegations, meeting in virtual mode during the 31st FAO Regional Conference for Africa, hosted by the Republic of Zimbabwe, from 26 to 28 October 2020,

Concerned about the Food Security and Nutrition situation in Africa, where, according to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World in 2020 (SOFI 2020), 250 million people are undernourished in Africa,

Noting that climate variability and extreme weather events, transboundary pests and diseases, including Fall armyworm, Peste des petits ruminants and Rift Valley fever, conflicts and adverse economic conditions have undermined efforts to achieve Food Security and Nutrition goals in several countries of the continent,

Deeply alarmed by the resurgence of the desert locust in East Africa, which has put livelihoods in this subregion at risk and is threatening livelihoods in West Africa,

Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic has gone beyond the stage of a health crisis by negatively affecting agricultural production and food systems in our continent, exacerbating the situation of food insecurity and nutrition in our countries.

Recognizing that food security and nutrition are essential for the maintenance of peace and safety and, conversely, that peace and safety are a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable food Security and nutrition, as well as for Investments and innovative solutions in support of resilient Food and Agricultural systems,

Further recognizing the importance of Food Systems Transformation as a means of stimulating inter-sectoral linkages, hence the need to adopt a comprehensive approach and take action for accelerated Food Systems Transformation in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Vision 2063,

Welcoming the convening of the United Nations Summit on Food Systems in 2021 by the United Nations Secretary-General,

Recognizing the important role of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the great opportunities it offers in increasing inter- and intra-Africa trade in agricultural products as well as linking the interconnected of African food systems and agriculture.

Convinced of the imperative to seize global, regional and national opportunities, such as participation in Global Value Chains, the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), expanding Markets, advances in Science and Technology, Innovation and Digitalization, and the Demographic Dividend, among others, that can drive and facilitate sustainable and inclusive transformation of agri-food systems,

Taking note, in this regard, of the conclusions of the final communiqué of the World Food and Agriculture Forum 2019, in which FAO actively participated, which decided to create an International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture

Acknowledging FAO's ongoing Strategic Planning process leading to the approval by the 2021 FAO Conference of a new Strategic Framework with FAO's vision and strategic objectives for the next ten years;

Remaining convinced of FAO's highly strategic role in supporting the Development and implementation of Policies, Strategies and Programmes, Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Development, as well as the Mobilization of Partnerships and Resources in support of the African Food and Agriculture Transformation Agenda,

Appreciating the generous contributions made by some Member Countries to the African Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF), established at FAO, which has been instrumental in the implementation of projects aimed at empowering Youth and Women, boosting Entrepreneurship and Employment, Mobilizing Partnerships and Capacity Building,

Inspired by the conclusions of the Virtual Meeting of African Ministers of Agriculture, hosted by the African Union on 16 April 2020 and the Joint Virtual Meeting of African Ministers responsible for Agriculture, Trade and Finance, held on 27 July 2020,

We agree on the need for strong action at national, sub-regional and regional levels to ensure the transformation of our Agriculture and Food Systems to meet the Development imperatives of our countries.

In doing so, we want to:

1. **Congratulate** FAO and its Director-General Dr. Qu Dongyu for the Hand in Hand Initiative, which provides us with an open framework for strengthening operational partnerships and the opportunity for our countries to benefit from technical support from the Hand in Hand Initiative's Geospatial platform as a tool for Country Common Analysis and the development of more ambitious Cooperation Frameworks for Sustainable Development, which take into account the great importance of Agricultural and Rural transformation;
2. **Congratulate** FAO on its significant steps and progress in Innovation and digitalization of Food and Agriculture;
3. Further **commend** FAO and the African Union Commission for their collaborative activities to promote and support gender equality and women's empowerment in agri-food systems;
4. **Welcome** FAO Programme for Intervention and Recovery in the context of COVID-19, which aims to promote strategic investments to prevent new crises, including any measures to mitigate negative impacts, and to build resilience to shocks and accelerate the rehabilitation and sustainable transformation of our food systems;
5. **Reiterate** our commitments to respond to the challenges related to COVID-19 as expressed in the Declaration on Food Security and Nutrition in the Context of COVID-19, adopted by African Ministers of Agriculture on 16 April 2020, and in the Joint Ministerial Declaration and its Programme of Action adopted on 27 July 2020 at the Virtual Joint Meeting of African Ministers of Agriculture, Trade and Finance, which was devoted to the impact of COVID-19 on food and nutrition security in Africa;
6. **We hereby undertake to:**
 - a) Raise our ambitions, accelerate our action and mobilize all stakeholders in the framework of the Decade for Action to achieve the development agenda by 2030 and to reach the MDGs, as well as the effective implementation of the Maputo (2003) and Malabo (2014) commitments;
 - b) Accelerate the transformation of African agriculture and agri-food systems, including through Innovation and digitalization in the Agriculture sector;
 - c) Provide technical input to the preparation of the 2021 UN Summit on Food Systems;
 - d) Improve governance at all levels, in order to create and maintain an enabling environment, empowering local communities and socially disadvantaged groups and enabling them to benefit from the opportunities offered by the transformation of food and agricultural systems and by efforts to build sustainable peace;

- e) Mobilize investment and partnerships for integrated, comprehensive and innovative approaches and systems that promote resilience, including social protection programmes that encompass the entire Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus, with the aim of moving away from humanitarian assistance to addressing the needs that underpin it, reducing risks and vulnerabilities and supporting prevention efforts;
- f) Strengthen and utilize regional integration mechanisms at regional and sub-regional-levels to promote our collaboration in addressing common challenges such as climate change, desertification, transboundary pests and diseases, including the recent desert locust invasion, but also to take advantage of the opportunities offered by regional frameworks such as (i) the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) and (ii) the being established African Food Safety Agency;
- g) Contribute to the African Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF) which is the instrument par excellence we have at our disposal to show that Africa is capable of taking charge and leading priority programmes.

7. Let us encourage FAO to:

- a) Deepen its commitment to the implementation of the repositioning of the United Nations Development System at country, sub-regional and regional levels, in particular to continue to adjust its decentralized office models to ensure greater flexibility and efficiency in the use of the Organization's limited existing financial and human resources to respond to the emerging needs and priorities of Member Nations, in line with the SDGs, and to provide leadership in inter-agency collaboration on the transformation of sustainable food systems;
- b) Continue to assist the African FAO members and other relevant stakeholders in building capacity for innovation in all its dimensions, including promoting the development of new technologies, practices, policies and institutions to support agriculture and food systems transformation, as well as the adoption of innovative financing and risk-sharing mechanisms;
- c) Promote multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral platforms to facilitate and strengthen dialogues to enhance investment, experience sharing and innovation for sustainable food systems, also in the context of the 2021 UN Summit on Food Systems;
- d) Design and support interventions for increasing production and productivity in agriculture, by accelerating mechanization, digitalization, and other appropriate technologies.
- e) Continue and intensify efforts to establish and maintain mechanisms and instruments for reporting on the achievement of the SDGs with a view to strengthening national statistical offices, particularly in view of the extension of the mandate of the latter- to monitor and report on SDG indicators, noting also the convergences between the main indicators relating to the implementation of the Malabo Declaration and the achievement of the SDGs.

8. **Encourage** the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) to participate fully in efforts to affirm the priority of transforming food systems, while advocating policies and strategies to support these efforts;

9. **Let us call on** our partners [banks,...]to accompany and support our action by increasing investments as we accelerate the transformation of food systems;

10. **Express** our thanks and appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe for hosting the thirty-first FAO Regional Conference for Africa.

Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 28 October 2020 (virtual)