

Opening Remarks

For Mr. Abebe Haile-Gabriel, ADG/RR for Africa, FAO

**at the Civil Society Organization Consultation on 28-29 March 2022 for the 32nd Session of
FAO Regional Conference for Africa (ARC32)**

- Your Excellency Francisca ENEME EFUA, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Forest and Environment of Equatorial Guinea
 - Mr KOLYANG PaLebele, President of PROPAC
- Heads and Representatives of the Civil Society and Producers' Organisations,
- Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greetings to you from the FAO Regional Office for Africa, based in Accra, Ghana.

1. On behalf of the FAO Director-General, Dr. Qu Dongyu, I wish to register FAO's appreciation to the Civil Society Organizations in the Africa region for inviting us to such an important event. We also express appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, through her Excellency Francisca ENEME EFUA, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Forest and Environment, for their collaboration as the host of the 32nd Session of FAO Regional Conference for Africa (ARC).

Regional state of food security

2. The most recent estimates of undernourishment, reported in FAO's Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021 shows that the number of hungry people in Africa continues to rise, spurred by multiple shocks such as conflict, climate change and economic slowdowns including those triggered by COVID-19.
3. In 2020, 281.6 million Africans were undernourished, an increase of 89.1 million compared to 2014.
4. In 2020 alone, Covid-19 may have added between 23-39 million people to the ranks of the undernourished in SSA.
5. While there was a dramatic worsening of world hunger in 2020, the sharpest rise was in Africa, where the estimated prevalence of undernourishment - at 21 percent of the

population - is more than double that of any other region. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points in one year.

6. The Third Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development (CAADP) Biennial Review (BR) Report (2015-2021), launched by the Africa Union earlier during this month, with technical support by FAO and other partners, shows that Africa as a whole is not on-track in achieving the seven Malabo Commitments including Ending Hunger by 2025.
7. While in Africa we have the issue of having to deal with multiple and overlapping shocks and threats, it is also evident that the mechanisms to manage and mitigate the impacts of those shocks are either inadequate or lacking.
8. National systems have not been in a position to handle crises of this magnitude. For example, African governments, with few exceptions, could not provide stimulus packages similar to what developed countries have done – yet most, if not all, African governments followed suit in enacting ‘lock-down measures’ to prevent the risk of spread of the virus.
9. Still there are concerns that most African economies will not be able to provide adequate post-pandemic recovery options – as a result, recovery is likely going to be slow and uncertain in Africa, compared to other regions.
10. For example, according to IMF projections, while advanced economies are forecasted to return to their pre-crisis growth path by 2023, countries in the SSA region would have to grow twice as fast in the next 3 years to match the type of recovery seen in advanced economies.
11. Meeting these challenges has never been easy, but other shocks such as climate change and global, regional and national instabilities add to the burden – with pernicious impacts on global trade, commodity prices, agriculture inputs prices (e.g., fertilizer) and complexities in supply chain logistics.
12. As you may be aware, Intra-regional trade is dismally low on the African continent compared to the rest of the world. It represents a mere 15% of total trade on the continent, compared to around 47% in the Americas, 61% in Asia, and 67% in Europe.
13. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) entered into force in January 2021, which is set to create the largest single trading bloc in the world by number of participating countries, with a combined GDP of over US\$3.4 trillion. Also, it aims at the elimination of up to 90% of tariffs on existing intra-regional trade flows, which is predicted to increase regional trade by up to 16%, equivalent to over \$16 billion.
14. AfCFTA promises to address the problem of fragmented markets for agricultural products and services in Africa by affording more profitable regional export opportunities for agribusinesses of a variety of sizes and at different segments of the value chain, positioning them to benefit from increased economies of scale.
15. This should also create more opportunities for smaller-scale entities, such as farmers and SMEs to participate in the supply chains of regional agribusinesses. A larger number of

profitable businesses that benefit from growing markets should provide additional incentives for increased investment in agriculture on the continent.

16. FAO has been collaborating with the African Union to support efforts for boosting intra-Africa trade in agriculture through trade facilitation and ensuring food safety and quality standard in trading agricultural products and food while promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as youth in agrifood systems.
17. Advances in innovation, particularly in digital innovation has facilitated business processes, significantly reducing costs and time of doing business – something that those involved in agrifood systems must have taken advantage.
18. The UNFSS – provided a platform for engaging governments and other stakeholders, including the private sector, calling for scale and urgent actions along transformative pathways, adopting new business models and partnerships in a systemic approach, through multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholders engagements.
19. The FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031 supports the Agenda 2030 through the transformation to More efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for Better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no one behind.
20. At the centre of the Four Betters are the very producers and consumers within driving the value chains – the farmers, the herders and the pastoralists, the fisher folk, the foresters, the rural people. When it comes to these stakeholders, in the African context, the matter is not just whether they should not be left behind. Rather, achievement of the goals itself will depend on whether they are fully engaged, enabled, capacitated in order for them to produce more efficiency and on a sustainable basis for an inclusive and resilient agrifood systems transformation.
21. We can only achieve Better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no one behind, when we work with producers, support their efforts for them to fulfill their aspirations fully.
22. We all recognize that the AU summit that was held in February this year launched the African Union Theme of the Year 2022, Year of Nutrition: “Strengthening resilience in nutrition and food security on the African continent”. We must use it as an important advocacy platform to advance agrifood systems transformation.
23. Africa has enormous potential; but unlocking this potential calls for strategic partnerships and cooperation with various actors including Civil Society and producer organizations, in addition to robust policies and strategies, enabling environment, capacity and skills development, science, technologies and innovation, trade and investments.
24. FAO has been collaborating with farmers organizations in Africa to advance our shared agenda. In this regard, I am pleased to recall the formalization of the collaboration with PAFO, earlier during the year, through signing of an MOU.

ARC32

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

25. The 32nd Session of FAO Regional Conference for Africa (ARC) will be held from 11th to 14th of April in a hybrid mode – i.e., both in person in Malabo and virtually for those who may not be able to travel to Malabo.
26. The conference brings together Ministers, Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives and Senior Officials from member states across Africa, representatives of civil society, the private sector, development partners and observer member countries for the conference to discuss, to share experiences and to define regional priorities in agrifood systems transformation.
27. The conference will deliberate on a number of topical issues ranging from results and priorities in the Africa region to FAO strategies on Science and Innovation as well as on Climate Change, to One Health Approaches to prevent pandemics, to recovery options from impacts of covid-19 and other shocks, to investing in ecosystem restoration, to opportunities of AfCFTA to promote investment and trade to placing women, youth and the poor at the forefront of inclusive agrifood systems.
28. The conference will also provide a platform for members and stakeholders to share experiences based on best practices on better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no one behind.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen:

29. Regional Consultations among the Civil Society are an integral part of the FAO Regional Conference process. The Civil Society Consultations are organized by and for civil society actors in the Africa region prior to the Regional Conference, and meant to gather key stakeholders, from different constituencies and countries, in order to discuss key topics pertinent to the region, and discuss on specific agenda items of the Conference, with the in-depth knowledge of the CSOs.
30. It is expected that the voices and views of civil society or stakeholders such as smallholder producers, family farmers, fishers and fish workers; pastoralists and herders; ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples; consumers; people who live on forest products; NGOs; Women and Youth will be heard through the CSO representations.
31. A written contribution is expected as a CSO Declaration at the end of the consultations and will be presented by representatives of the CSOs as part of the FAO Regional Conference. This would further contribute to elaborating regional priorities in the next biennium relevant to FAO's mandate.

In Conclusion,

32. Partnership is central to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and is also at the heart of FAO's mission to end hunger and achieve food security for all. The effectiveness of FAO to support members in strengthening policy, capacity, knowledge and data – more generally

technical expertise depends on the extent to which we can engage with all concerned in food and agriculture and develop effective partnerships and collaboration.

33. We are convinced that the regional consultations by CSOs for the Regional Conference greatly enrich the debates and recommendations on regional priorities prior to the FAO Regional Conference, and contribute to further development of FAO's engagement with civil society for effective partnership in the region and in the world.

34. I wish you all fruitful and productive discussions and consultation over the next two days.

Thank you