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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR AFRICA

## Thirty-third Session

**Rabat, the Kingdom of Morocco, 26-28 March 2024 and 18-20 April 2024**

**Agrifood systems transformation in Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries, and Landlocked Developing Countries**

### Executive Summary

Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) face challenges like vulnerability to climate, socioeconomic shocks, and food insecurity. In June 2023, a High-Level Ministerial Event was organized to discuss common challenges and strengthen FAO's technical support by identifying actions to transform their agrifood systems and scale up progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the Event, Ministers and high-level representatives from SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs issued a Call for Action that proposed, among other things, the establishment of a Ministerial network for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs to promote knowledge sharing and resilience building to climate change and to food insecurity, as well as to secure investments to scale up the transformation of agrifood systems.

Data-driven decision-making, multistakeholder collaboration and capacity development are crucial for agrifood systems transformation in these countries. At this Ministerial Roundtable in Rabat, Morocco, participants are expected to share knowledge on possible solutions to transform agrifood systems in each group of countries.

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## I. Rationale and scope

1. Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) face significant development challenges stemming from their specific economic, social and geographic situation. They are highly vulnerable to climate change, extreme weather events, global market fluctuations given their heavy reliance on food imports, and other shocks as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic and with the war in Ukraine. Their level of resilience to climate change and food insecurity is limited and is among the many development challenges they face.
2. Thirty-nine countries in the Africa Region are SIDS, LDCs and/or LLDCs: six SIDS, 33 LDCs and 16 LLDCs; three countries are both SIDS and LDCs, and 13 are both LLDCs and LDCs.
3. Agriculture in most of these countries is primarily characterized by subsistence farming and small-scale agriculture, and challenges related to climate change, limited access to resources and market constraints. Many citizens lack access to basic necessities such as clean water, sanitation and education. Diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS, combined with malnutrition, remain significant challenges. Unhealthy diets lead to increasing obesity and overweight, with a severe burden from non-communicable diseases.
4. In 2020, FAO became the first Specialized Agency in the United Nations system to establish an Office exclusively addressing the needs and challenges of SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs. The Organization also prioritizes SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs through targeted initiatives, including the Hand-in-Hand Initiative. In addition, FAO established the SIDS Solutions Platform in 2021, which brings together stakeholders from SIDS, including those in Africa, and focuses on identifying and promoting innovative solutions to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems. The Platform incubates and promotes country-relevant innovations, including digital technologies to accelerate progress in agriculture, food security, nutrition, environment and health.
5. Ministers and high-level representatives from SIDS, LDCs, LLDCs and FAO partners met in Rome, in June 2023, to address common challenges, enhance FAO's support and boost progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Ministers and high-level representatives from SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs issued a Call for Action requesting, among others, that the outcome of the event be shared at relevant upcoming fora; and requested the establishment of a Ministerial network – with technical support from FAO – for these countries to facilitate knowledge sharing and to build collective resilience to climate change and to food insecurity, as well as to secure investments to scale up transformation of agrifood systems through means of implementation such as:
  - a. the Hand-in-Hand Initiative;
  - b. the One Country One Priority Product Initiative;
  - c. the Green Cities Initiative;
  - d. the 1000 Digital Village Initiative;
  - e. the Blue Transformation roadmap; and
  - f. innovative climate financing, including the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility.
6. In November 2023, the FAO African SIDS Programme organized a high-level Ministerial event and partners forum in Mauritius, which aimed to finalize a work plan and road map to advance innovative solutions, partnership building and joint resource mobilization that could accelerate agrifood systems transformation. A capacity development programme is at the heart of the work plan. The consultations carried out identified six priorities: a) better governance and the institutional framework for agrifood systems; b) more efficient, inclusive, sustainable and resilient agrifood systems through climate-smart Agriculture; c) sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the framework of Blue Transformation; d) market access and structuration, and value chain development; e) empowerment of youth and women, and nutrition; and f) innovation, communication, knowledge sharing, and technology transfer.

## II. Commonalities and specificities

### A. Commonalities

7. FAO estimates that approximately 62 percent of employment in Africa is in agrifood systems.<sup>1</sup> In African SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs, however, agrifood systems drivers need strengthening. Access to production factors and resources are the main challenges for agricultural productivity and agricultural inputs and equipment/machinery are mainly imported.

8. Local and export markets and connectivity – including transportation infrastructure and networks, as well as information and communications technology – are increasingly in crisis. Combined effects of climate change and natural resource degradation increasingly limit land and water availability and renewable energy generation. Increasing dependence on food imports, continuing food loss and waste, and inadequate logistics infrastructure contribute to food insecurity and malnutrition.

9. Investing in agricultural development based on climate- and energy-smart technologies, digital agriculture, precision farming and science-based technological innovation can contribute to improving agrifood systems productivity, value addition and resilience. Facilitating trade and market access through strategic partnerships, technical cooperation and evidence-based policymaking are key to ensuring socioeconomic and sustainable growth in these countries. To make these solutions effective, it is required to invest in human capital through education and skills training, and to increase access to information, knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and capacity development.

### B. Specificities

10. **SIDS** are characterized by geographic remoteness, vulnerability to climate change impacts, limited economic diversification, heavy reliance on tourism, and challenges with freshwater resources, arable land, energy sources, connectivity and human resources. *African SIDS*, especially those in the Indian Ocean,<sup>2</sup> are highly vulnerable to extreme weather events. Overexploitation, pollution and climate change threaten their main livelihoods (marine resources, fishing and tourism). Air and sea transport and connectivity are still weak and costly. Addressing transportation and communication costs, streamlining supply chains, and promoting climate-smart practices can stimulate economic diversification by improving market access, operational efficiency, resilience and sustainability.

11. **LDCs** specifically face extreme poverty, inadequate healthcare and infrastructure, low human capital development and hindrances from political instability and conflict,<sup>3</sup> impeding their economic growth. LDCs *in Africa* tend to have higher population density, leading to great pressure on natural resources, with progressively degrading soil. Many of them have experienced prolonged conflicts and political instability. Transportation, energy, and communication infrastructure gaps are worsening. Policy reforms can create an enabling environment for investment, innovation, entrepreneurship, economic diversification, job creation, and access to new markets.

12. **LLDCs**, without direct access to the sea, face high trade and transportation costs, limited market access, inadequate transport infrastructure and trade barriers. *African LLDCs* depend on transit through neighbouring countries for access to seaports and maritime resources, including international markets. They experience high trade costs, delays, and logistical challenges. Diplomatic efforts and well-targeted investments are key to strengthening regional trade facilitation agreements, and developing multimodal transport, communication, and energy systems, to enhance agrifood systems efficiency and resilience.

## III. Objectives

13. The objectives of the Ministerial Roundtable are:

- a. to align the three groups of countries with the same level of information on the interventions carried out to promote agrifood systems transformation;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/cc4337en/cc4337en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381952>

<sup>3</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ldc2021\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ldc2021_en.pdf)

- b. to share knowledge and experiences to pave the way for creative partnerships; and
- c. to provide regional insights on the functioning of the Ministerial network for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs.

#### IV. Proposed agenda

- Duration: 2 hours (12.00–14.00).
- Format: Roundtable discussions, in-person with virtual participation.
- Participants: Representatives of governments, and partners (donors, the private sector, civil society organizations, and academia and research institutions).

Time	Intervention	Speakers
5 minutes	Welcoming remarks	FAO
7 minutes	Scene setting remarks: - <a href="#">Achieving SDG 2 without breaching the 1.5 °C threshold: A global roadmap, Part 1 (fao.org)</a> African SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs – common challenges and solutions	FAO
5 minutes	African SIDS experiences to drive agrifood systems transformation: -The interregional technical network (ITN) -The work plan priorities and the roadmap	FAO
20 minutes	Discussions: -How do we keep the ITN dynamic? -How do we undertake joint resource mobilization to implement the priorities?	Ministers from African SIDS: - Seychelles - Cabo Verde - Sao Tome and Principe
5 minutes	African LDCs – priorities to boost agrifood systems transformation: -Specific challenges -Proposed solutions	FAO
20 minutes	Discussions: -Do you have any additional solutions? -How do we implement these solutions?	Ministers from African LDCs: - Chad - Somalia - Madagascar - Sierra Leone
5 minutes	African LLDCs focus on accelerating agrifood systems transformation: -Specific challenges -Identified solutions	FAO
20 minutes	Discussions: -Do you have any additional solutions? -How do we implement these solutions?	Ministers from African LLDCs: - Central African Republic - Botswana - Rwanda
30 minutes	Discussions: -How do we build on the commonalities? -Joint initiatives -Insights for the Ministerial network for SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs	Ministers from the three groups of countries: - Mauritius (SIDS) - Senegal (LDCs) - Zimbabwe (LLDCs)
3 minutes	Conclusions and closing remarks	FAO