

RUFORUM THOUGHT PIECE ON Pre-UN Food Systems Summit 2021



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Building back better and stronger African Food Systems - the policy imperatives for SDG2

A food-secure Africa will not surface by default. On the contrary, hunger, poverty and malnutrition must be consistently mitigated and checkmated at all fronts. As such policy frameworks must create the shift for a functional African Food System to emerge! Consequently, it is imperative that ***Africa's Voice*** regarding its food system is heard at the 2021 Food System Summit which is expected to take place later in the year.

This important dialogue session could not have taken place anytime than now, as the Food Systems Concept in Africa needs to be properly understood and in place for Africa to achieve the SDGs, particularly SDG2. This is within the context of the of the RUFORUM dialogue. In a similar vein, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), together with the Sub-regional Organizations (SROs) and our Partners including FANRPAN organized a continental consultative dialogue on '***Strengthening the African Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D)***'. The

main output of that dialogue was a policy brief (***One Africa Voice***) which seeks to draw attention of the world to ***game changing strategies*** to improve the African food system.

I am convinced that all these dialogues being organized by institutions and organizations on the continent will ensure that Africa's voice is heard loud and clear at the impending Food System Summit. The food system of the continent need to be improved, and I believe that the Food System Summit offers Africa the greatest opportunity and an entry point to intensify global advocacy to build back better bolder and stronger African Food System.

From my point of view, it is difficult to understand why Africa, which is blessed with abundant natural resources, including an estimated **60 percent of the world's uncultivated arable land**, continues to suffer from high levels of under- and malnutrition and spends billions every year on importing food. Africa still struggles with the problem of low agricultural productivity.

Meeting SDG 2 targets will only be possible if people have enough food to eat and if what they are eating is nutritious and affordable. Five years after the world committed to end hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition, the world and Africa in particular is still off track to achieve this objective by 2030 (FAO, 2020).

Available data tell us that the world is progressing neither towards SDG target 2.1 (ensuring access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food for all people all year round), nor towards target 2.2 (eradicating all forms of malnutrition). In Africa, food insecurity, poverty, malnutrition, and the negative effects of climate change continue to affect millions of people.

The percentage of undernourishment in Africa was 19.1 percent in 2019, up from 17.6 percent in 2014. In terms of the outlook for 2030, Africa is significantly off track to achieve the Zero Hunger target in 2030. In terms of the distribution of total food insecure people in the world, out of the 2 billion people suffering from food insecurity, **675 million are in Africa (FAO, 2020)**.

The role of research in improving agriculture and enhancing the food system in Africa cannot be underestimated. To transform and improve the food system of the continent, the attention of agricultural research must be focused on addressing the numerous challenges confronting the food system. It is only by



RUFORUM THOUGHT PIECE ON Pre-UN Food Systems Summit 2021

rapidly transforming the agricultural sector through improved research and development can Africa change its story in terms of food security and nutrition towards the achievement of SDG2.

It has been shown that about 75% of Africa's population draw their livelihoods largely from the agricultural systems, and hence every effort to raise agricultural productivity will surely translate into improvement of livelihoods on the continent. The African research institutions continue to apply and promote science and technology to address the food insecurity and malnutrition situation on the continent, but these efforts need to be intensified to ensure rapid transformation of the food system.

Going forward, it is important to highlight some of the major challenges confronting Africa's food system, and which have captured the attention of the research communities on the continent. The food system of the continent continues to be challenged with **low productivity of crops and livestock, depleting soil fertility, outbreak of pest and diseases, declining resilience to the negative effects of climate change, inefficient trade and market system, policies that lower economic incentives to invest in agriculture, armed conflicts, and incidence of diseases including HIV/AIDS and the present Covid-19 pandemic.** These issues have contributed enormously to the food insecurity and malnutrition situations in which the continent currently finds itself.

1. The following elements will be crucial to the transformation of the African food system agenda.
 - Increase investment in agriculture from the current average 3.3% of annual GDP by African countries (commitment is 10%).
 - Promote policies that ensure economic incentives to invest in agricultural production and modern inputs. (Incentives for private sector investment, economic, trade, and intellectual property right (IPR) policy reforms).
 - Increase investment in Agricultural Research (human resource and infrastructure) from the current average 1% of Agricultural GDP.
 - Promote the Science Agenda – Science Agenda for Africa Agriculture (The S3A Agenda).
 - Strengthen research-extension-farmer linkage to promote the adoption of improved technologies and innovation.
 - Build and strengthen solidarity and collective actions through partnerships that mobilize research and innovation expertise.
 - Co-creation of technologies and innovations with farmers, to address the farm's challenges while providing local solutions.
 - Enhance the capacity of farmers and consumers to contribute to research and innovation, and to policy formulation and implementation. The good news is that there is a way out of these undesirable situations!
2. It will be crucial for us all to ensure that the Africa therefore takes a consolidated policy message to the UNFSS.
 - The potentials for increased productivity and opportunities for agri-food transformation are huge in Africa.
 - The Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa (S3A) represents an urgent and realizable opportunity for Africa to realize its agriculture potential.



RUFORUM THOUGHT PIECE ON Pre-UN Food Systems Summit 2021

- The Covid-19 pandemic has delivered new severe shocks to food systems, impacting demand and supply potentially leaving an additional **132 million people undernourished worldwide- the time to act is now.**
 - Africa's economic models should be promoted to ensure market-based approaches for agricultural products.
3. Furthermore, on a continent-wide basis, the African Union Commission (AUC) should attend very urgently to the following:
- The fact that Africans can afford to pay USD 50 billion in importing food shows that the resources to fund agriculture and research exist.
 - What is lacking is the political will to invest in the systems that support national food systems to make them more self-sufficient in food.
 - Market-driven approaches should be promoted and strengthened.
 - The policy environment should assure that activities and services across the entire spectrum of the food system function to accelerate progress towards SDG 2 (zero hunger).
 - Making agriculture attractive to the youth is key to ensure the sustainability of the agricultural sector.
 - The development of foresight systems to guide transdisciplinary approaches in solving complex challenges could have a big impact on productivity, competitiveness, and job creation on the continent.
 - Strengthening the capacities of the smallholder producers and SMEs is a key element to generate effective demand for science, technology, and innovation.

In conclusion, our efforts to ensure improved agriculture and food system on the continent must increasingly move away from the subsistence farming methods and promote profitable agri-businesses. While we continue to learn from the experiences of other regions, Africa as a matter of urgency needs to develop and apply locally adapted solutions that fit the needs of the continent. Policies to support the food system on the continent should not be prescribed as if Africa is a single country. I encourage research institutions and researchers on the continent to enhance their partnership efforts to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2) – which is "to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture", and at the same time help to transform the continent into the food basket of the world.

This is our Third issue in a series of articles we are releasing as part of our RUFORUM Thought Pieces on the Pre-UN Food Systems Summit 2021. This Thought Piece is part of the discussion Issues presented by the author during "Selected Advocates for Africa's Development Dialogue" on 17 June 2021. You can get more information about RUFORUM at www.ruforum.org. You may also share your thought piece about the Food Systems with us by writing to e.adipala@ruforum.org and copying e.acan@ruforum.org



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About the Author

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