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Delivering Food for Africa in a Transforming Agri-food System in the 'New Normal'- Response by the African Union Commission

- COVID-19 has been reported in 54 of the 55 AU Members States – with over 600,000 positive cases and over 13,000 deaths. This is, therefore, a continental problem that requires continental and regional approaches to address its impact on food security and nutrition.

- This being an academic and scientific platform, let me challenge the notion of the “new normal”. Nobody can tell with certainty what will settle as the new normal because it is a very dynamic situation that is still evolving. Today’s responses may not be effective tomorrow.

- Africa’s agriculture has been hit by three shocks: the fall armyworm in 2018; the desert locusts in 2019 in the Horn of Africa; and COVID-19 in 2020. This is on top of the impact of on-going climate change. All these shocks have had negative impacts on food production and trade due to disruption in the agricultural value chain.

- Africa’s agriculture is not resilient, because if it was, we would not be holding this seminar. And this cannot be blamed on COVID-19. The sector has systemic and structural challenges that must be addressed to make it more resilient.

Response by the African Union Commission:

The African Union Commission has been mobilizing efforts to support our Member States to respond to COVID-19: in the short-term to save lives, and in the medium-term to recover better and stronger.

In the short-term:

- We stepped up our advocacy efforts through interactions with the Permanent Representations (Ambassadors) to the African Union through briefing sessions by various departments
- Mobilization and distribution of supplies to Member States, particularly personal protective equipment from various sources

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RUFORUM THOUGHT PIECE ON COVID-19

- Strengthening capacity for testing for COVID-19 internally at the AU Pan-African Veterinary Vaccine Center (PANVAC) and also supporting Member States.

For the medium-term:

- The AU Commission, with technical support from FAO, organized a meeting of Ministers of Agriculture on April 16, 2020 to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition in Africa. A total of 52 AU Member States attended, with 45 represented by their Ministers of Agriculture. The Ministerial meeting culminated in a declaration that called for interventions by Ministries of Agriculture (mobilize farmers to plant during planting seasons; support farmers with inputs); Ministries of Trade (keep domestic markets functional, reduce post-harvest losses; keep borders open to facilitate regional food trade); Ministries of Finance (mobilize domestic and external resource to finance the agreed actions in agriculture and trade).
- The Ministers established a high-level Task Force to follow up on the implementation of the actions in the Ministerial declaration. The Task Force is composed of AUC, FAO, European Commission, IFAD, WFP, World Bank, AfDB and AUDA-NEPAD. This partnership of development, technical and financial institutions is needed to ensure synergy among the various interventions.
- The interventions in the declaration require the interventions by Ministries of Agriculture, Trade and Finance. As such the AU Commission is organizing a joint virtual meeting on 27 July 2020. The meeting will bring together the Ministers for Agriculture, for Trade, and for Finance to discuss and agree on actions needed to respond to the short-term impact of COVID-19, and also the actions need to build more resilient food systems in Africa post-COVID-19.

This is our fifteenth issue in a series of articles we are releasing as part of our RUFORUM Thought Pieces on the Corona Pandemic. This Thought piece is part of the discussion points raised by Dr. Bahiigwa during the 4th RUFORUM Webinar on "[Delivering food for Africa in a transforming agri-food system in the 'new normal'](#)" You can get more information about RUFORUM at www.ruforum.org. You may also share your thought piece about the Pandemic with us by writing to e.adipala@ruforum.org and copying m.arena@ruforum.org

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About the Author

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Before joining the AU, he was the Head of the International Food Policy Research Institute's Eastern and Southern Africa Office in Addis Ababa.

Dr. Bahigwa holds a PhD in Agricultural Economics from the University of Missouri-Columbia, United States of America (USA).