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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SMALL-SCALE FARMING, FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA

A SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS AMONG KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN THREE REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES

“WITHOUT WORK, WE WILL DIE OF HUNGER BEFORE WE GET SICK FROM CORONA”¹



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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has triggered the second biggest crisis in a decade, and possibly the worst recession ever, whilst many countries have not yet recovered from the 2008 financial crisis. These are unprecedented times that will dramatically increase inequalities and have severe impacts on people in developing countries. The pandemic has hit hardest those who have no access to healthcare, who lack a social safety net to fall back on, who don't rights to sick leave, are in precarious work conditions, have no access to land titles, and those with the greatest unpaid care responsibilities. Among those most impacted by this pandemic and its fallout are poor small-scale farmers, many of whom are women. Whilst being very vulnerable, small-scale farmers

also show incredible resilience and supporting them is a key way to help meet the food needs of the people.

Already in 2019, 135 million people were determined as being acutely food insecure. WFP has warned of famine of “biblical proportions,” due to COVID-19, which can lead to an increase in acutely food insecure people to 265 million people.² FAO estimates that, if the anticipated global recession were to trigger a reduction in the growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP) of between two and ten percentage points in all countries in 2020, then the number of undernourished people in net food-importing countries would increase by 14.4 million to 80.3 million.³

In West Africa alone, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic could increase the number of people at risk of hunger and malnutrition from 17 million to 50 million people between June and August 2020.⁴

In order to allow urban and rural populations feed themselves, it is crucial to ensure that food systems and supply chains are not broken. However, to date, insufficient attention has been given to the cumulative impact of COVID-19 on agriculture and food systems. Agriculture in Africa, with its millions of small-scale farmers (crop growers, pastoralists, fisherfolks, and foresters) and small rural enterprises, is the source of income and food for 70-80% of the population. As restrictions are placed on the movement of goods and people and businesses

are shut down, small-scale farmers are being directly and negatively impacted, and the food security of millions of people is being threatened. It is imperative to listen to those people most impacted by the economic shock resulting from COVID-19.

In this context, small-scale farmer leaders and key strategic partners from the East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) convened to discuss the impacts of the pandemic on small-scale farming, food security, and sovereignty. Through a series of webinars,⁵ co-convened with CNC, ESAFF, Trust Africa and their members, they defined current challenges and identified actionable strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on food security and sovereignty in the regions.

production and the supply of food, particularly for urban areas. In EAC and SADC, the pandemic surfaced during the planting season, and the ability for farmers to perform their work is impacted due to limited seed sharing options and the lack of production inputs. In the livestock sector in West Africa, this is the period of transhumance for millions of herders who drive their herds south where the pastures are still green. The closure of the borders directly impacts the feeding of livestock and threatens their survival. In the absence of government measures to feed the animals (i.e. supply of cattle feed) until the wet season, enormous losses for the Sahelian herds are feared.

“LAST YEAR AT THIS TIME OF YEAR, VEHICLES CAME TO LOAD OUR PRODUCTS EVERY DAY. THIS YEAR, THE VEHICLE ARRIVES EVERY WEEK.”

**HASSAN SANKARA,
ONION WHOLESALER IN
BERENGA/BOBO DIULASSO
(BURKINA FASO)**

FOLLOWING ARE KEY INSIGHTS THAT CAME OUT OF THE WEBINAR SERIES:

THE PANDEMIC COULD SEVERELY EXACERBATE PRODUCTION SHORTFALLS: LOCUST-AFFECTED AREAS IN EAST AFRICA, ONGOING DROUGHT IN THE SADC REGION, AND CIVIL INSECURITY ISSUES IN WEST AFRICA ARE NOW FURTHER COMPLICATED BY THE PANDEMIC.

Amidst climatic hazards that are affecting agricultural and fodder production, farmers are not able to continue with farming activities due to restricted access to their fields, especially for collective labor which hinders

MARKET CLOSURES HAVE CATASTROPHIC IMPACTS ON FARMERS’ INCOMES AND LOCAL FOOD AVAILABILITY: ACROSS THE CONTINENT, THERE IS LIMITED ACCESS TO MARKETS AND INPUTS DUE TO LIMITED MOVEMENT OF TRADERS AND BUYERS AND DISRUPTED VALUE CHAINS. PERISHABLE GOOD ARE LEFT ROTTING IN THEIR FIELDS, REDUCING FOOD AVAILABILITY IN THE MARKETS OVER THE MEDIUM AND LONGER TERMS. SMALLHOLDER FARMERS ARE LOSING INCOME AND A SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD.

Hassan Sankara, onion wholesaler in Berenga/Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso), testifies: “Last year at this time of year, vehicles came to load our products every day. This year, the vehicle arrives every week. In the past, our customers used to transfer money from Ghana and we would send the load to them, but with the closure of markets and borders this practice has been stopped”.

In addition, the availability of non-farm work that many rural households rely on to diversify their incomes is likely to shrink, as are incomes from remittances from in-country cities and from abroad where industries have closed. This means household food and nutrition security could be further compromised.

WOMEN ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED: WOMEN SMALL-SCALE FARMERS WILL BEAR THE BRUNT OF THE CRISIS, PARTLY BECAUSE THEY ARE ALSO OFTEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CARE OF CHILDREN, THE SICK, AND THE ELDERLY. THIS MEANS THEY HAVE INCREASED EXPOSURE TO COVID-19, WHICH HAS KNOCK-ON IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD PRODUCTION, FOOD PREPARATION, AND CHILD NUTRITION. *WOMEN* PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN PROVIDING FOOD FOR THEIR FAMILIES YET HAVE LIMITED OWNERSHIP OF LAND AND FACE CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING CREDIT AND IMPROVED TECHNOLOGIES.⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and mobility challenges and restrictions have further entrenched women at the periphery of the production curve. Women are not able to produce food at the required levels and cannot access markets to sell that food, which is often their main if not only source of income. For some countries like Uganda, the only allowable mode of transportation is bicycles, which the majority of women do not own or are unable to ride due to restrictive social customs. Additionally, walking exposes women to violence; for instance, security personnel

are beating citizens to enforce COVID-19 lockdown measures in some countries like Uganda.⁷ Women tend to be paid less for their produce, particularly when forced to sell for emergency funds to pay for health expenses and for the survival of their household members. Finally, as the contribution of women to the workforce is often hidden, their needs are excluded in analyses which, in turn means they are underserved by policies and government actions.

NUTRITIOUS FOOD IS BECOMING MORE EXPENSIVE: FOOD PRICES IN MANY MARKETS ARE SAID TO HAVE INCREASED, LEADING TO CITIZENS BUYING LESS NUTRITIOUS FOODS, WHICH MEANS THEY ARE UNABLE TO HAVE A BALANCED DIET. AT THE SAME TIME, FARMERS ARE RECEIVING VERY LOW PRICES, SINCE, DUE TO THE RESTRICTIONS ON MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE, THEY CANNOT TAKE THEIR PRODUCE TO MARKET AND ARE THUS BEING EXPLOITED BY MIDDLEMEN. PARTICIPANTS IN THE EAC WEBINAR STATED THAT SOME BUSINESSMEN IN THE REGION ARE HOARDING AGRICULTURE PRODUCE AND INPUTS.⁸

THE TERMS OF TRADE ARE BEING NEGATIVELY IMPACTED: AT NATIONAL LEVELS, A DROP IN COMMODITY PRICES, WHICH MANY COUNTRIES DEPEND ON FOR THEIR FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS, HAS LED TO WORSENERD TERMS OF TRADE.⁹ THOSE COUNTRIES THEREFORE FACE REDUCED CAPACITY TO IMPORT FOOD, LEADING TO AN INCREASE IN FOOD PRICES IN

THE MARKET, WHICH AFFECTS HOUSEHOLDS' PURCHASING POWER.

In response, the EAC farmer representatives call for sustaining production within the borders of the region. EAC spends about USD 1,795.8 million on importation (wheat, rice, and maize) from outside the region, and about 130 million small-scale farmers comprise the majority of the population (60% to 70%) in EAC. They contribute about 25% GDP on average and are the main food producers. If they are supported in strengthening their resilience and productivity, it will simultaneously alleviate foreign exchange spending and support their livelihoods.

Ken Ukahoa, President of the National Association of Nigerian Traders (NANTS) says: "Many of the economies depend on extractives, yet the revenues (for oil and gas) have depleted, that would have been used in the agriculture sector. The 10% Maputo commitments risks being swallowed by COVID-19 (for health expenditures). If this is swallowed, it means that food security is at shambles."

"Food security is of critical importance & must be elevated to support local production and value-chains to combat COVID-19 and hunger," says Mr. Glenn Farred, Executive Director, SADC-CNGO

A continental free trade area, if not designed to promote and protect local food systems, would undermine the territorial market approach that small scale farmers anticipate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the public health risks across Africa are acute, the response to COVID-19 must also ensure that livelihoods and the right to food are protected, given that millions of people have lost their livelihoods and economies are already failing. The economic implications of this pandemic may be more than just health-related if we do not protect smallholder farmers.

Unfortunately, even though agriculture is a priority policy objective of the AU and its RECs, most African nations have not delivered on the commitments made in the Malabo Declaration of 2014: to increase agriculture productivity by 6% through investing at least 10% of the national budget in the agriculture sector. Only four countries are on track to achieve the Malabo Commitments according to the second CAADP Biannual Review Report of 2020: Rwanda, Morocco, Mali and Ghana.¹⁰ Burundi is on track to invest more in agriculture; Uganda is on track to end hunger by 2025; and Zimbabwe, eSwatini are on track to eliminate malnutrition. COVID-19 makes a fulfilment by all AU Member States of the commitments in the Malabo Declaration all the more necessary. In a recent declaration¹¹ from the African Ministers of Agriculture on food security and nutrition during the COVID-19-pandemic, African governments committed to ensuring that measures are in place to support the food security and nutrition for all, especially the most vulnerable.

A number of actions have indeed been put in place by governments as an immediate response to COVID-19 and the effects it is having on the population, which is to be applauded. Across the continent, agricultural inputs and livestock feed are being distributed to support food and pastoral production; food stocks for free distribution or for sale at moderate prices are being reinforced; and National Solidarity Funds are being set up. Having said that, when comparing the specific interventions with the structural measures required to strengthen the adaptive capacity of farmers, as well as the immediate responses needed to tackle the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis indicates a number of gaps. To ensure farmers can plant, harvest, market, and benefit from their products through logistical support, subsidies, and market access between rural and urban areas, the following recommendations are being proposed. These will simultaneously stimulate local production essential for food supply and boost incomes for a substantial number of small-scale producers.

GOVERNMENTS AND FUNDERS MUST PROTECT SMALL-SCALE FARMERS: ALL NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND THE AFRICAN UNION-- FOLLOWING THEIR RECENT COMMITMENT¹¹ TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FOOD SYSTEMS IN AFRICA AND OPTIMIZE RESOURCES TO RESPOND TO THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED TO RESTRUCTURE, STRENGTHEN AND CUSHION LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS TO SHOCKS--MUST ADOPT INCLUSIVE AND MUTUALLY ACCOUNTABLE APPROACHES TO ENSURE ALL NATIONAL AND LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS ARE PROTECTED. THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS IN PARTICULAR HAVE BEEN ARTICULATED BY STAKEHOLDERS DURING THE WEBINARS AROUND WHICH THERE WAS A HIGH LEVEL OF SUPPORT:



ENSURE AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS

- The stimulus packages announced in response to the pandemic must be targeted to those that really need it -- the most vulnerable people: small-scale farmers & workers who are the least able to cope with the economic shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Civil Society participation in the process must be arranged for and transparency in the response must be delivered on.
- Local communities must be involved in the design of post-crisis plans and corresponding budgets, and these plans must respond to the needs of the small-scale farmers and workers.



SAFEGUARD FARMING POPULATIONS AND CONSUMERS WITH SAFETY NETS

- Provide food and cash grants, ensuring women are able to access and benefit from them. In some regions such as West Africa, the lean season is fast approaching (May to September); if the food assistance provided for in the response plans of countries is not delivered on time, the food and nutritional security of the population will be compromised. These plans must cover the food needs of both rural and urban populations.

- Establish and strengthen Food Reserves to be used during emergencies. Organize for institutional purchases of local stocks of agricultural products currently held by Producer Organizations.
- Improve access to COVID-19 information by use of local structures, to keep people updated on the status and situation that affects them. This includes health messaging, information about government actions to curb the pandemic, and information about restrictions on movement of people, including how to stay safe when traveling.
- Provide Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) access to arable land and possibilities to replenish their herds for those who have lost their animals.



MAKE MARKETS WORK AMIDST COVID-19

- Ensure the safety to small scale farmers as essential service providers by providing them with resources like hygiene kits by cleaning infrastructure they depend on, etc. as measures to prevent COVID-19 contamination
- Measures restricting inter-regional mobility must not disrupt market access for processors and consumers.
- Provide pricing information to small scale farmers so that they are able to negotiate for fair prices
- Guarantee, in consultation with producer organizations, minimum prices for crops like maize, sorghum, rice, soya, cowpea, tomato, onion, potato, milk, meat, etc.



TARGET FARMERS, WITH A SPECIFIC FOCUS ON WOMEN AND YOUTH, WITH SUPPORT PACKAGES TO SUSTAIN LIVELIHOODS:

- Response mechanisms on the continent need to be guided by gender analyses to identify and respond to the unique needs of different groups of women and youth who are not homogeneous.

- Ensure gender data on the contribution of women small scale farmers in different countries on the continent is available, analyzed and actionable. All interventions should consider disaggregation of data by sex, age as well as other key indicators. These should be considered in data collection, analyses and reporting.
- Strengthen women cooperatives, and ensure their participation in decision-making processes, so that their issues in food systems are represented in the most practical, safe, and meaningful ways possible.



ENSURE THE FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS ARE RESPONSIVE TO BOTH RURAL AND URBAN POPULATIONS:

- Establish farming/agriculture as a key sector to be kept open, so that labour be available to harvest crops, transport produce to the market, and sell the produce. Issue specific passes for producers, pastoralists, and agropastoralists to allow them timely access to their fields and farms.
- Support time-saving labour strategies in cases where there is reduced labour due to restrictions on movement of people and/or family members falling sick.
- Support small scale farmers with to access to inputs like seeds, technologies, extension services etc. particularly for those areas where seasons are still ahead (second season for most of East Africa and Southern Africa).
- Improve storage and processing to help reduce postharvest crop losses along the disrupted supply chain.
- Address financial constraints, including for SMEs. Engage financiers to restructure agricultural loans. Think of alternative modalities for women who have limited assets for collateral. Support farming savings groups.



SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES AND HEALTHY MENUS RESILIENT TO THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

As plans develop, ensure climate resilience be built in, drawing from climate financing funds for resilience-building.

- Support farmers in caring for the biodiversity of their communities, with special attention to seeds, soil, water, and trees.
 - Strengthen land rights, a prerequisite for farmers' commitment to / investment in soil quality, water retention, irrigation, and (communal) forests.
 - Promote co-management of natural resources, particularly of collective resources such as water bodies and forests.
 - Support farmers' seed systems by protecting farmers' rights to save, store, reuse, exchange and trade their seeds; by enhancing their access to genetic resources; and by including them in breeding programmes.
 - Strengthen farmers' extension services and focus them on climate resilient sustainable agriculture. Strengthen farmers' information systems, particularly of weather forecasts and market information.
 - Support agro-ecological practices.
- Promote production of diverse and nutritious foods, to enhance resilience to pandemics like COVID-19 by enhancing the immune system of people.
- Support transitions to territorial markets. With the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), as necessary in revitalizing intra-African trade during the COVID 19 pandemic, ensure small-scale farmers receive due support and local food systems are protected.
- Deliver on the CAADP Malabo Declaration goal 6, which is the Commitment to Enhancing Resilience of Livelihoods and Production Systems to Climate Variability and other related risks.



GOVERNMENTS SHOULD ENSURE THE BUDGET ALLOCATED TO THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN 2020/2021, AMID COVID-19, REFLECTS THE COMMITMENTS IN THE MALABO DECLARATION, BY PROGRESSIVELY INVESTING AT LEAST 10% TO ENHANCE RURAL FARMING LIVELIHOODS AND ENSURE QUALITY FOOD SUPPLY AND RAW MATERIALS.

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PARTNERS



About Trust Africa; Since 2009, Trust Africa has been working with farmers' organizations to strengthen their ability to hold their governments to account to commitments they made as members of the African Union, including allocating 10 percent of national budgets to the sector.

Grants have supported advocacy by smallholder farmers' organizations, civil society organizations and policy research organizations in Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Nigeria, Ghana and Burkina Faso. Building on previous successes, partners continue to petition for transparency in national budget allocations to agriculture, better support and provision of extension and advisory services and a bigger role for smallholders in the agriculture value chain.

Current and future work includes continued support for increasing the capacity of these groups to participate in policymaking processes, with attention to helping advocates with tabling their policy requests and advancing smallholder issues at the continental level.

Website: www.trustafrica.org/en/programme/socio-economic-justice/agriculture-advocacy



About ESAFF: The Eastern and Southern Africa small-scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF) is a network of grassroots small scale farmers' organizations working in 16 countries of Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) region including South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa, Lesotho, DR Congo, Madagascar, Seychelles and Mozambique. The movement which started in 2002 during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg – South Africa is a small scale farmer initiated, farmer led and farmer owned.

Website: www.esaff.org
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About the CAADP NSAs Coalition (CNC): The CAADP Non-State Actors Coalition (CNC) is a Pan- African coalition of Non-State actor groups engaged at different stages of the agricultural value chain in Africa. The coalition's members comprise of food producer groups including crop farmers, pastoralists, and fisher-folk organizations, associations of business entities involved in agriculture such as chambers of commerce, agro-processor and commodity associations, civil society advocacy groups with a leaning towards agriculture. Through this coalition, Non-state actors coordinate their support for the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture development program (CAADP) agenda through constructive engagement. Its strategies include constructive engagement/ advocacy towards relevant authority structure, capacity building for NSAs, and rendering technical support for effective advocacy around agricultural issues. The coalition was launched on 27th March 2015 by the African union during the 12th CAADP Partnerships Platform in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Website: www.cncafrica.org
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About the Oxfam Pan Africa Programme: The Oxfam Pan Africa Programme (PAP) is the Oxfam International advocacy, campaigns and influencing agency engaging citizens and institutions in the realization of an Africa that is self-reliant, democratic, peaceful, and responsive to the rights and development needs of her citizens.

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