



Prof. Ibrahim Adam El-Dukheri
Executive Secretary, Arab Organization for Agricultural Development

Strengthening Afro-Arab Partnership for Agricultural Development

The Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) was established in 1970, upon the desire of the Arab countries. Realizing the vital role of agriculture within the region's economy, the Arab countries recognized the need for coordination between their different policies in agriculture, natural and human resources as well as economic development, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of a fully integrated Arab economies.

The idea behind the establishment of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development was based on a number of socioeconomic reasons prevalent during the 1970s, amongst which the most important were: the desire by the countries to strengthen their agricultural and economic sectors on solid foundations, based on technical know-how and benefiting from the experience of others; the recognition of the importance of the agricultural sector within the Arab economies, the conviction that the development of agriculture will lead to economic well-being of the people and the countries; the realization that Arab agricultural resources have not been exploited to their full potential nor in the most efficient and effective manner; the striking similarities in environmental and socioeconomic conditions between the different Arab countries, as well as the nature of their agricultural challenges. "The knowledge that better exploitation of, and maximization of the agricultural sector would enable the Arab countries to meet their needs in other sectors of the economy; and the awareness that an integrated Arab agricultural coordinated policy could only be attained through better coordination between Arab countries'.

The overall objective of the AOAD is to identify and develop linkages between Arab countries and to promote partnership with other regions and nations, and to coordinate agricultural and agricultural -related activities.

African-Arab Partnership

The African - Arab partnership was subsequently created to ensure the realization of Afro-Arab Co-operation. The Partnership objectives were: to promote the relationship between the Arab and the African Countries; to undertake joint initiatives to address the challenges facing the agricultural sector and trade in both regions; and to encourage the economic integration between the Arab and the African countries at large.

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At a recent consultative forum convened by the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) in collaboration with the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) and the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) held in Kampala, Uganda, 30 September -2nd October 2019, the parties explored opportunities for collaboration to promote higher agricultural education and business prospects in agriculture while applying and utilizing science, technology and innovation (ST&I) to address some of the cross-countries constraints affecting agricultural sector in Africa and in the Arab States.

Organisations participating in the forum included the African Development Bank, OCP Group, Trade and Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Mastercard Foundation and Uganda Government represented by four line Ministries (Agriculture, Education, Finance and ST&I) and University representatives from several African countries. Participants deliberated within the context of youth as active participants in both higher education and agricultural value chains, acknowledging that several of Africa's youth originate from small-holder farms where technologies would boost production and productivity to create upstream employment for graduates and out-of-school youth. There was consensus that effort be made to integrate African universities in African Union Commission and AOAD joint activities.

Afro - Arab partnership operational Activities and the needs

The operational activities of Afro-Arab partnerships are as follows: advocacy for a common vision for the Arab world and Africa; formulation of an Afro-Arab Fraternity Pact; regular organization of the Afro-Arab Trade Fair; re-energizing of the coordination structures; establishment and consolidation of Afro -Arab partnerships in economic and trade matters; promotion of Afro-Arab investments in the agricultural sector; investment promotion and Africa's Integration framework; financing and/or co-funding issues related to proposed programmes; and promotion of Afro-Arab Cultural Cooperation.

This message, on behalf of AOAD, focusses on issues of: Intensity, costs and further threats from invasive pests and diseases in Africa region: needed regional policy interventions and institutional support mechanisms; Building collective financing for regional level response; and building Africa's capacity for confronting invasive pests and diseases.

Right now, there is a need for integrated efforts to strengthening the Afro-Arab partnership through linking the Arab States represented by the Arab Organization for Agriculture Development (AOAD) with African Universities under the umbrella of African Union Commission and RUFORUM. This will address developmental issues, youth entrepreneurship and employability and food and nutrition insecurity issues. This would invariably require strong engagement of especially Africa's universities. As such there is a need for a tripartite agreement involving AOAD - AUC- RUFORUM.

Secondly, Agriculture and livestock production chains as well as trade across boundaries from African to Arab States and vice versa are currently challenged by frequent occurrence of

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devastating trans-boundary animal disease epidemics that require regionally coordinated response activities. There is also the recurrent invasion by the desert locust and other crops pests and disease attacks especially in the Horn of Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, with devastating impact on the agriculture sector and livelihoods. On the other hand there is need to build resilience of the people that live across west Africa, eastern Africa, Northern Africa and the Gulf region semi-arid and arid areas. These call for urgent collaborative action that the Afro-Arab partnership must address. Invariably, these will require coordinated policies and collaborative research to generate innovations and policy across the Afro-Arab world. We need to engage and support research and build the needed institutional and human capacity for the continent. We at AOAD see a critical role for RUFORUM in this which AOAD and AUC should take advantage of. We should work together and develop new initiatives to respond to the current and emerging challenges, for example on management of transboundary livestock diseases, initiatives to build resilience to climate change and variability, and strengthening agri-food systems in arid and semi-arid ecosystems. AOAD suggests that we work jointly with AUC and Member States to establish Regional Centres for Training and Research on some of these aspects with RUFORUM providing a coordinating role.

Moreover, AOAD in partner with AU is chairing the Joint Steering Committee for agriculture development and food security. AOAD participates as a technical team together with AU Commission for formulation and development of joint projects that have been approved by Arab and African Head of States in Malabo 2013. To strengthening the Afro – Arab Partnership, we should engage RUFORUM as a Technical Partner to galvanize participation of African Universities.

I therefore call for collaborative efforts and joint programmes among Arab States on one side and, African Union Commission and Governments on the other side to harness the capacity in African universities and research institutions to develop collaborative actions to address current and emerging challenges. Therefore, it is an opportunity to closely work with RUFORUM as implementing agency for African Union programmes besides being a Network of African Universities to move forward with the Afro-Arab joints developmental activities. In addition there is an urgent need for strengthening partnerships to support policy interventions to address the current and emerging challenges. I strongly urge that human capital development be an integral part of agricultural development initiatives. Let us collaborate and establish Reginal Centres to build capacity for responding to current and future crop-livestock diseases and climate change and variability. We need to build capacity in basic science fields such as training entomologists, plant pathologists, livestock scientists including epidemiologists and strengthen capacity for biotechnology application. We must also build capacity for foresight so that we prepare for future eventualities. Finally I call upon Development Partners and our Governments to support the five continental initiatives^{1*} adapted by the Africa Ministers

¹ * 1. Strengthening Higher Agricultural Education in Africa (SHAEA)

2. Strengthening Africa's Science, Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Capacity for Economic Development (SASTIE)

during their meeting held on 5th December 2019 in Cape Coast, Ghana. We in AOAD commit to support these initiatives. We similarly urge AUC to support the five continental initiatives.

This is our eighteenth issue in a series of articles we are releasing as part of our RUFORUM Thought Pieces on the Corona Pandemic. It is based on the authors opening remarks and some of the emerging issues during the fifth RUFORUM Webinar on 29th July 2020 focusing on “Building a Regional Collective Response to Invasive pests and transboundary crop-livestock diseases”. 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.agenia@ruforum.org

About the Author

His Excellency Prof. Eldukheri is the Director General of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD). Prior to that, His Excellency was the Federal Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, and Director General of the Agricultural Research Corporation (ARC) in Sudan as well as Minister of Agriculture and Forests, South Darfur State of Sudan

His Excellency Prof. Eldukheri is also a Professor of Agricultural Economics with over 20 years' experiences in Policy Analysis especially on food security issues and vulnerability analysis.

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3. Building Africa's Science and Technology Capacity for Economic Growth (BASTIC)
 4. Regional Initiative to Strengthen Staff Capacity and Increase the Pool of Women Scientists in African Universities (RISSCAW)
 5. African Digital Agricultural Programme: Digital technologies for agricultural transformation (AfriDAP)

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