

Delivering food for Africa in a transforming agri-food system in the 'new normal'

Webinar 4: 15 July 2020

Globally, COVID-19 has delivered debilitating effects on economies and livelihoods. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) had indicated that there were some 820 million people that were undernourished including 135 million experiencing acute food insecurity. From the global hungry population, 256 million (20% of Africa's population) people remain hungry in Africa while an estimated 239 million are undernourished in Sub-Saharan Africa region. While we do not seek to be pessimistic about Africa as a continent, we seek to bring upfront that prior to COVID-19, there were already dire straits that Africa as a continent had to deal with, COVID-19 is adding complexity to these statistics.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold, its implications on food and nutrition security will be profound. The disruptions on production and food supply chains for both domestic and imported food and food products as well as income loss and limited remittances are creating considerable tensions and food and nutrition security risks across the continent. The associated food price spikes due to disruptions in the supply chains have the potential to increase the depth and scope of poverty among many segments of society. Considering the current patterns of disruptions associated with COVID-19, the food security/insecurity hotspots include: (i) the urban areas affecting mainly the urban poor, wage-based workers as well as those that have lost their enterprises and income sources; (ii) refugees, internally displaced persons as well as persons in fragile and conflict affected countries with already stressed logistical systems and distributional challenges, (iii) countries with multiple crises including natural and environmental hazards orchestrated by extreme events such as floods and droughts; (iv) the already poor and vulnerable populations in the continent, these have already been in dire need; and (v) countries with currency depreciation and inflation affecting cost of food imports and ability to afford food.

The World Bank's April 2020 analysis further indicates a fallout effect of COVID-19 on the Africa continent in particular Sub-Saharan Africa arguing that the pandemic will cost the region between \$37 billion and \$79 billion in terms of output losses in 2020 alone. In the interim, many African governments are responding reactively to address the immediate needs of the people especially meeting the food needs and addressing the shortages in the PPEs caused by measures imposed on logistical movement of goods within and across countries. Most of these measures have hurriedly assembled immediate responses as they address the immediate challenges in the interim but are at a risk of falling out in the medium to long-term trajectory, which will grossly impact on the food security of the people at local, regional and continental level.

Considering the potential out-play in the medium and long-term trajectory that the current pandemic will have on food security and its onward effects to the agri-food systems, it is time to consider strategic

response directions. Noting from an ongoing discourse on agrifood systems impacts of COVID-19 in Africa, Itcovitz (2020) observes that the restrictions in production, demand, trade and transportation are already producing a series of heterogeneous impacts in different agricultural value chains; varying only by product types, access to inputs, trade dynamics, transport dynamics and costs as well as commodity prices and regulations. But, it remains critically important to keep the agri-food systems functioning if we are to continue delivering requisite food needed to avoid a food crisis in Africa as well as maintain a degree of livelihoods stability.

This webinar on delivering food for Africa in a transforming agri-food systems in the 'new normal' seeks to deliberate on the need to: (i) Re-contextualize support for enhancing productivity and marketing systems for smallholder farmers; (ii) Innovations for delivering agricultural advisory services to farmers to enable them make smart decisions; (iii) Innovations for reducing logistical bottlenecks and enhancing e-commerce; and (iv) Innovations for multiple agricultural and social protection interventions.

Panelists

1. Dr. Simeon Ehui, Regional Director for Sustainable Development for Africa, World Bank, Washington D.C
2. Dr. Agnes Kalibata, President, AGRA, Nairobi-Kenya
3. Hon. Dr. Owusu-Afriye Akoto, Minister for Food and Agriculture, Government of Ghana, Accra-Ghana
4. Prof. Abebe Haile-Gabriel, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Africa, Accra –Ghana
5. Dr. Godfrey Bahigwa, Director, Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union Commission, Addis Ababa- Ethiopia

Discussant: Prof Frans Swanepoel, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Moderator: Prof. Dora F. Edu-Buandoh, Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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