

## RUFORUM WEBINAR 6

### **Universities and Research Institutions Supporting Family Farmers During and Post COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa**

#### **Synthesis Report**

##### **Introduction:**

Family farmers produce almost 80% of the world's food in value terms, dominate the agriculture sector in Africa, and are central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). In general, family farmers include peasant farmers, indigenous peoples, traditional communities, pastoralists, fishermen, mountain farmers and other groups of food producers. In Africa, family farmers feed and employ two thirds of the population and are central to a sustainable future for agriculture, eradicating hunger and poverty, achieving social cohesion, employment and sustainable use of natural resources. However, family farmers rely on traditional modes of farming with very little use of machinery and lack access to improved crop varieties, fertilizers, irrigation, and financial services to enable them to invest in modernising and intensifying their farming practices. Furthermore, they face limited access to agricultural and other innovations in the sector, which are essential for enhancing productivity, as well as coping with some of the anticipated challenges in the post COVID-19 Pandemic era. Universities and research institutions, as major components of national innovation systems, are well positioned to develop capacities of family farmers and contribute to local solutions to address the current and post COVID-19 impact on family farmers. However, the support from universities and research institutions should respond to the real needs of family farmers and should complement initiatives being undertaken by national governments and development partners.

This report highlights emerging issues and action points from RUFORUM Webinar 6 on ***Universities and Research Institutions Supporting Family Farmers During and Post COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa*** held on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2020. The Webinar was co-organized by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations and RUFORUM.

##### **The Problem:**

Containment measures put in place by Governments to limit the spread of the COVID-19 have disrupted local food systems in many African countries. For instance, provision of agricultural services and transportation of farm produce have been negatively affected, processing of farm produce has slowed down, markets have temporarily closed, and family farmers are unable to sell their produce, especially perishable products, resulting in significant losses. The COVID-19 Pandemic is leading to a Food and Nutrition Security crisis, which is also affecting the welfare of family farmers. This is in addition to the already existing challenges faced by family farmers such as climate variability, invasive pests and transboundary crop-livestock animal diseases, regional insecurity and conflict, to mention but a few. The

uncertainty of farming activities due to various factors including the COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa is threatening the wellbeing of family farmers, the agri-food systems and the achievement of SDGs and CAADP targets.

### **Webinar Objectives:**

The Webinar on *Universities and Research Institutions Supporting Family Farmers During and Post COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa* aimed at:

1. Exploring options for promoting rural communities' initiatives, and development and transfer of technologies;
2. Harmonization of regional policies and strategies to support family farmers; and
3. Exploring Strategies to reinforce the capacity and resilience of family farmers, especially women and youth, and their organizations to cope with shocks.

This Webinar was moderated by **Prof. Abebe Haile-Gabriel, Assistant Director-General, FAO, Accra-Ghana** while the Guest Speaker was **H.E. Sacko Josefa Leonel Correa**, Commissioner, Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union Commission (AUC), Addis Ababa-Ethiopia.

The presentations and discussions were given by:

1. Ms. Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director General, FAO, Rome-Italy
2. Hon. Michael Katambo, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Lusaka-Zambia
3. Dr. Marcela Villarreal, Director, PSU Division, FAO, Rome-Italy (Lead Speaker)
4. Dr. Stephen Muchiri, Chief Executive Officer, Eastern Africa Farmers Federation, Nairobi- Kenya
5. Dr. Abdou Tenkouano, Executive Director, CORAF, Dakar-Senegal
6. Prof Brice Sinsin (Discussant), Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Abomey Calavi, Cotonou, Benin

### **Key Learning and Action Points:**

#### **1. Regional policies and strategies:**

- The commitments of Member States to the CAADP processes encompass the building of resilience of livelihoods of family farmers to climate variability and other shocks such as the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, in order to ensure that family farmers contribute to the achievement of SDGs and that African Union Member countries meet CAADP targets, there is a need for increased collaboration among key stakeholders in agri-food systems while recognizing the important role of regional coordination and solidarity through Regional Economic Communities. Agri-food system scalable solutions are needed that can be domesticated at regional level, using the example of the CORAF model.
- Governments need to renew and increase their commitments to investing in the agriculture sector to ensure not only the provision of food but also the sustenance of their citizens' health, protection of the environment and creation of jobs for the growing youth. There is still a need for concrete policies from African Governments to support family

farmers, and funding for research and university training. In the same vein, there is a call for the establishment an **Agriculture Emergency Fund** by Governments to help farmers in times of uncertainties and financial emergencies such as during the current COVID-19 Pandemic. At the global and continental levels, FAO and African Union Commission have already committed to supporting access to food and nutrition for Africa’s most vulnerable groups including family farmers through a joint declaration on Food Security and Nutrition.

- Whereas the Member States of the African Union scribe to the aspirations of Agenda 2063 for a continental market with a free movement of persons, goods and services which are critical for deepening economic integration and promoting agricultural development, food security, industrialisation and structural economic transformation, more still needs to be done to effect the African Continental Trade Area (ACFTA) Agreement of 21st March 2018 signed in Kigali, Rwanda. As such African policy makers are called upon to commit to effecting the ACFTA in order to increase market access for family farmers and enhance import substitution.
  - Governments through the formalisation of the RUFORUM Charter can increase the role of RUFORUM Member Universities in supporting the national efforts of building agricultural higher education, science, technology and innovation capacities.
2. **Agriculture Technology Development and Transfer:** Universities and research centres should continue to generate knowledge that is accessible to farmers for building resilience particularly through food production and diversification of food sources. The technology and innovations should address the challenges throughout the agricultural value chains. The development of agricultural technology needs to be accompanied with innovative ways to transfer the technology to the farmers, for example through specialised Agricultural Advisory and Extension Services, making science make sense and enabling markets to access farmers.
3. **Capacity Building for Family Farmers and Universities:** In order for universities to effectively support family farmers, they need to be supported to remain at the center of innovation and scientific discoveries. However, It is important for universities to re-position and recognise that the COVID-19 Pandemic is also an opportunity to build the African agri-food systems and “build back better”. As such universities should urgently update their curricula, build strong and synergistic linkages with communities to produce and transfer relevant technologies for farmers, integrate studies with industrial experience and strengthen university-industry partnerships to reduce the disconnect, and support governments to design policies and strategies to help countries build back better from the COVID-19 Pandemic.

#### **Main Conclusions:**

- The contribution of family farmers to the attainment of SDGs depends on their access to markets, regional coordination, capacity building and policies responsive to their peculiar needs.

- Universities have a role to play in making science make sense to family farmers by developing relevant technologies and innovations in collaboration with communities and private sector.
- There is a need to change the narrative and for the recognition of existing mechanisms for different voices including that of family farmers to be heard in the agri-food systems.
- Policy support is needed from African Union Commission and Member States to scale up research efforts to generate and scale up technologies and to test alternative uptake pathways; Universities need to be incorporated in such efforts.
- Universities need to intensify engagement with family farmers and other actors in agri-food value chains.

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