

# PRIORITIES FOR AFRICA'S FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY POST-COVID-19.

A contribution from the Task Force Rural Africa (TFRA) to  
the AU-EU Summit, October 2020.

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## FOREWORD

A deep sense of concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives and livelihoods of Africa's people has inspired the writing of this contribution. As members of the Task Force Rural Africa (TFRA), we produced a report in March 2019 on what we thought was needed to transform Africa's agriculture and rural economy. Less than one year later, COVID-19 struck Africa and the rest of the world with devastating effect.

Another important change since March 2019 has been the shift on climate policy, represented by the EU Commission proposal in December 2019 of the European Green Deal (EGD). This ambitious vision, aimed at making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, will have implications for Africa – Europe relations.

The combination of COVID-19's impact on Africa and the EU's climate policy change has led us to re-examine the analysis and the recommendations in our original report. We have drawn one central conclusion from our work: that food and nutrition security has become of such fundamental political, economic and social importance that it must be at the centre of all future policy and planning. We have built our report on this conclusion and produced a set of short and long-term recommendations we believe are relevant to the new world shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We hope our contribution may help in the preparation of the AU-EU Summit in October 2020. The Summit will seek to agree the long-term basis for partnership between Africa and the EU. It will meet at a crucially important time, shortly before the US Presidential election, when the world will be looking to see how Africa and Europe, separately and in partnership, can contribute to an effective multilateral response to global challenges and the current COVID-19 crisis. We wish the leaders well in their efforts.

Tom Arnold

Chair, Task Force Rural Africa (TFRA).

## MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE RURAL AFRICA (TFRA)

The members of the Task Force Rural Africa (TFRA) were selected and appointed in a personal capacity on the basis of their expertise and experience in agriculture, agri-business or agroindustry, trade, development policy or migration related issues and first-hand knowledge of the agri-food sector in Africa. The experts are affiliated to the following entities:

### **Tom ARNOLD (chair)**

Chair, Irish 2030 Agri-Food Strategy Committee. Former Coordinator, Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. Former Chief Executive, Concern Worldwide

### **Kees BLOKLAND**

Managing director Agriterro, board member Agri-ProFocus and member steering group Netherlands Food Partnership.

### **Albert ENGEL**

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Bonn, Eschborn, Germany

### **Chinwe IFEJIKA SPERANZA**

Professor of Geography and Sustainable Development, Unit Leader Land Systems and Sustainable Land Management, Institute of Geography, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

### **Bruno LOSCH**

Lead political economist, CIRAD (French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development), co-director of the Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, and head of Programme, Centre of Excellence in Food Security, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

### **Baudouin MICHEL**

Special Envoy for Francophone Africa, EU, UA and UNESCO, African Parks Network, South Africa; Lecturer, University of Liège-Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech, Belgium; Director, ERAIFT, Democratic Republic of Congo; CEO, Domaine de Katale, Democratic Republic of Congo

### **Francesco RAMPA**

Head of Programme, Sustainable Food Systems, European Centre for Development Policy Management

### **Christine WIECK**

Professor for Agricultural and Food Policy, Institute of Agricultural Policy and Markets, University of Hohenheim, Germany

### **Mashiri ZVARIMWA**

Principal Partner, Rubix Management Consulting. Board member, Youth Alliance for Zero Hunger.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The key objective of the AU-EU Summit in October 2020 is to agree a new comprehensive strategy between Europe and Africa. It will do so against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic which has taken a huge toll in lost lives and in economic damage, within Africa, Europe and internationally. It is impossible to estimate the eventual scale of these losses, but it is already clear that the biggest impact has been on the poorest and most vulnerable people, with women being particularly impacted in many countries and social situations.

While the impact of COVID-19 is part of the changing context within which the Summit must take decisions, another is the important policy shift represented by the European Green Deal (EGD),<sup>(1)</sup> including the new 'NATURAFRICA' concept, proposed by the EU Commission in December 2019. The EGD aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. It has an important agri-food and rural economy dimension, through its Farm-to-Fork (F2F) Strategy,<sup>(2)</sup> Biodiversity Strategy <sup>(3)</sup> and the next reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Assessing how the implementation of the EGD will impact on economic and social life within the EU is still at an early stage: judging how it may impact on future Africa/Europe relations is at an even earlier stage, but this will be an important factor in planning for the coming decades.

The Task Force Rural Africa (TFRA) was established in 2018 to advise on how best to contribute to sustainable development in Africa's agri-food sector and rural economy, issuing its report in March 2019. <sup>(4)</sup> The TFRA has now revised its recommendations to take account of the significant change in context, due to COVID-19 and the EGD, by comparison to when the original report was finalised. This current contribution is presented to the AU and EU Commissions to assist in the preparatory work for the AU-EU Summit meeting.

Our analysis of the new context facing Africa and Europe has led us to one central conclusion: that food and nutrition security has become of such fundamental political, economic and social importance that it must be at the centre of all future policy and planning. Thus, we propose that the AU-EU Summit should commit to a set of short and long term policies to deliver on this food and nutrition security objective.

For the short term – until end-2021 – we suggest that the Summit should commit to three high level political priorities:

- Address the urgent needs of the most vulnerable African populations impacted by COVID-19 and, in certain countries and regions, by the plague of locusts
- Lay the foundations of long term sustainable African food systems through strengthening the resilience of local food systems and the local economy
- Bring climate action to a new level of political priority through committing to an Africa Europe Climate Alliance and agree the early stages of bringing this Alliance into being.

For the longer term, to 2030, the TFRA endorses the proposal of the European Commission and the High Representative on Foreign Affairs and Security <sup>(5)</sup> that cooperation between Africa and Europe should be based on partnerships in five key areas: green transition; digital transformation; sustainable growth and jobs; peace and governance; and migration and

mobility. For each of these five areas, there should be an agri-food sector and rural economy dimension in their planning and delivery.

The original TFRA report recommended that four strategic areas of action should underpin the transformation of Africa's agri-food sector and rural economy:

- A territorial approach for income and job creation
- Sustainable land and natural resources management, and climate action.
- Sustainable transformation of African agriculture
- Development of the African food industry and food markets

The TFRA repeats its endorsement of these areas as providing the basis for consistent and sustained policy, adjusted to take account of national circumstances, for African governments and for African-EU development programmes. This updated report makes recommendations on new priorities under each of these strategic areas, to take account of the new context.

A central recommendation of the original TFRA report was that Africa and Europe should implement an innovative partnership for the inclusive and sustainable development of Africa's agri-food sector and rural economy. The partnership should operate at three levels: people to people, business to business, and government to government as a way to build a stronger multi-stakeholder dialogue. We see this as being a partnership of equals, sharing experience of political and economic integration, developing joint answers to climate change and migration, as well as innovation in new pathways for economic and social progress. Building capacity, particularly of African women and youth; participatory governance; and the involvement of education and research institutions should be integral to the partnership. We believe that this model of partnership should have a key role in responding to the new challenges Africa faces.

But African development will not be based on an exclusive partnership with Europe. We believe that both Africa and Europe must fully engage with wider multilateral and international processes. In proposing that the AU-EU Summit should commit to three short term high level political priorities, we envisage that the first priority of addressing the most urgent food and nutrition security needs of Africa's most vulnerable populations should be part of a wider international effort to protect the most vulnerable in the post-COVID-19 era; the second priority on sustainable food systems should link to the UN Food Systems Summit (FSS) in 2021; and the third priority involving the Africa Europe Climate Alliance should link to the next Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) COP 26 meeting, also to be held in 2021. Africa and Europe will wish to make their own distinctive contributions to each of these international processes but there will be areas of common ground to promote within them.

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND HOW TO RESPOND

The Task Force Rural Africa (TFRA) was established in 2018 to advise on how best to contribute to sustainable development in Africa's agri-food sector and rural economy, issuing its report in March 2019. Because of two major contextual changes since then – the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the change in European climate policy represented by the European Green Deal (EGD) - the TFRA has revisited the analysis and recommendations in its original report. In this contribution, we present the evidence which has led us to propose three high level political priorities to the AU-EU Summit in October 2020 as well as revised priorities for the four strategic areas of action of our report.

The high level political priorities we recommend to the Summit are as follows:

- Address the urgent needs of the most vulnerable African populations impacted by COVID-19 and, in certain countries and regions, by the plague of locusts.
- Lay the foundations of long term sustainable African food systems, through strengthening the resilience of local food systems and the rural economy.
- Bring climate action to a new level of political priority through committing to an Africa Europe Climate Alliance and agree the early stages of bringing this Alliance into being.

In addition, we set out below the revised priorities, in light of the changed context, for the four strategic areas of action we had envisaged as the foundation for the transformation of Africa's agriculture and rural economy, namely:

- A territorial approach for income and job creation
- Sustainable land and natural resource management, and climate action
- Sustainable transformation of African agriculture
- Development of the African food industry and food markets

Following on from the publication of reports from the TFRA and the Digital Task Force in 2019, the EU Commission will later this year fund Africa-Europe Alliance Task Forces in four areas: digital economy; transport and connectivity; sustainable energy; and sustainable agriculture. We hope that this TFRA contribution, with its revised priorities, allied to the analysis and recommendations in our original report, will be of value to this process, in particular to the work of the Task Force on Sustainable Agriculture.

It is impossible to predict what the eventual impact of COVID-19 will be, in terms of loss of life and long term health effects, and in economic damage, at regional or international level. The World Bank baseline forecast projects a 5.2 percent contraction in global GDP in 2020, the deepest global recession in decades. Sub-Saharan Africa GDP is projected to fall by 2.8 percent, related to falling demand for Africa's commodities, capital flight, a virtual collapse of tourism and air transport associated with lockdowns and border closures, and depreciation of local currencies. Remittances, an important source of income for many households in Africa, are projected to decline by 23 per cent (\$37 billion). These various factors will combine to reverse years of progress towards development goals and tip tens of millions of people back into extreme poverty.

What distinguishes the current pandemic from previous epidemics or pandemics is its potential to cause multiple shocks across the economy. It has impacted disproportionately on low income workers, particularly in urban areas, and in countries with the weakest healthcare and social protection systems and the most fragile food systems. In Africa's significant informal sector, workers (86 per cent of the workforce) cannot comply with social distancing and stay at home orders without severe consequences for their lives and livelihoods. Almost 90 per cent of women employed in Africa work in the informal sector, with no social protection. Female headed households are particularly at risk.

There is a major concern that the pandemic will lead to a dramatic rise in food and nutrition insecurity and potentially devastating disruptions to the global food supply chain. Estimates from the International Food Policy Research Institute suggest that because of the pandemic an additional 140 million people will be thrown into living in extreme poverty on less than US \$1.90 per day in 2020.<sup>(6)</sup> The Standing Together for Nutrition consortium suggest that in 2020 COVID-19 will produce a 14.3 % increase in moderate or severe wasting among children under 5 years compared to projections for 2020 without COVID-19, translating into an additional 6.7 million children, 58% of whom in south Asia and 22 % in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>(7)</sup>

Along with the pandemic, Africa faces another serious problem not affecting other regions to anything like the same degree- an infestation of locusts. This is threatening East Africa with estimates that it will be 20 times worse than the February 2020 wave that hit eight countries in the region and was the worst outbreak in 70 years. Efforts to control the locust outbreak have been hampered by the limited supply of pesticides available due to border closures, a lack of alternative measures, and ongoing flooding in certain countries. The combination of the pandemic and the locusts represent an alarming threat to food and nutrition security in the countries and regions affected.

In light of the above analysis, we have proposed to the Summit the following three political priorities, and a number of early actions to work towards these priorities:

#### ADDRESS THE URGENT NUTRITION NEEDS OF AFRICA'S MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Africa's most food insecure regions, due to lack of development of its agriculture, conflict, drought and locusts, should be a priority for concerted and urgent humanitarian action by the international community, with the EU playing a leading role.

There should be a substantial scale-up of social protection systems to take account of the 'new poor' caused by the pandemic. Countries with existing well- functioning social protection systems should be supported to expand them. Countries which currently do not have social protection systems should be helped to establish them. Nutrition should be factored into the design of current and new social protection systems, as healthier diets via better immune systems can reduce threats to human health. There is considerable scope for the use of digital technology in developing and rolling out these systems.

Women's welfare has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in a number of ways: loss of earning given the cutbacks in the informal economy; isolation and an increase in domestic violence; and probably an increase in undernutrition due to the cultural norm that women are the last to eat in families and when food is short, they are the first to go without. These factors should be taken into account when social protection systems and national recovery strategies



are being developed. Emergency cash transfers as part of social protection programmes should be designed with women's realities in mind. Stimulus funds as part of recovery programmes should ensure that women with businesses get a fair share of these funds.

## LAY THE FOUNDATIONS OF LONG TERM SUSTAINABLE AFRICAN FOOD SYSTEMS

Two important EU Commission documents provide a basis to frame an AU-EU political commitment towards long term sustainable African food systems. The communication 'Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa' stated its ambition that 'The EU and Africa must join efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goal of zero hunger and address the challenge of food and nutrition security by boosting safe and sustainable agri-food systems'. The Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F) aims at 'promoting the global transition to sustainable food systems' envisaging that 'Through its external policies, including international cooperation and trade policy, the EU will pursue the development of Green Alliances on sustainable food systems with all its partners in bilateral, regional and multilateral fora. This will include cooperation with Africa, neighbours and other partners'. The development of the 'NATURAFRICA' concept, proposed by the EU Commission, aims to consolidate the biodiversity in large landscapes in Africa, through the promotion of the 'Green Economy' with a high degree of inclusiveness with the local communities.

A further building block in working towards sustainable African food systems is the commitment in the Joint AU-EU Agriculture Ministerial Declaration and Action Agenda (June 2019) [\(8\)](#) to 'intensify cooperation in sustainable agricultural/rural development/forest management, agroforestry, sustainable food systems, through the initiatives provided for in the Action Agenda, seeking synergies with other national led actions such as the National Agricultural Plans (NAPs)'.

The UN Food Systems Summit (FSS), scheduled for September 2021, will aim to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the SDGs in 2030 [\(9\)](#). Food systems affect the natural environment and every aspect of human life and are central to feeding the human population, while protecting human and planetary health. Malnutrition in all its forms is the number one factor contributing to the global burden of disease and reduced life expectancy. The impact of COVID-19 makes all these challenges harder.

Africa has particular challenges, due to its unachieved demographic transition, resulting in a massive youth bulge and demand for job creation. It has its continuing burden of undernutrition, high levels of child stunting and- as in all other regions- increasing rates of overweight and obesity with the attendant associated longer term costs to health and public finances. It has fragile ecosystems threatened by population and unbalanced spatial development. For all these reasons, Africa requires a decisive shift towards sustainable food systems. An extensive and inclusive programme of preparations is planned for the Food Systems Summit: African countries should work closely with the EU to ensure that their interests are fully represented and their voices properly heard at the Summit.

## BRING CLIMATE ACTION TO A NEW LEVEL OF POLITICAL PRIORITY THROUGH AN AFRICA EUROPE CLIMATE ALLIANCE

During the negotiations for the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, the EU and AU disagreed on their approach to agriculture and climate change. Post-Agreement, they resolved to make agriculture more central in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process.

The High-Level Group of Personalities on EU-Africa Relations, meeting on 1 July 2020, discussed shaping an Africa-EU Climate Alliance as a central plank for re-setting relations between the neighbouring regions. The Group suggested that a just transformation based on ecological development could be the foundation of the new normal between the two continents and that an Africa-Europe Climate Alliance could identify key areas of convergence and divergence in the respective approaches to Sustainable Agriculture and Sustainable Energy.

The TFRA is strongly in favour of supporting such bold thinking. In our original report, we recognized the urgency of more effective climate action but were dismayed at the then inadequate policy framework and priority for such action, both a national level in Africa and within Africa/EU development cooperation programmes. A political commitment to an Africa Europe Climate Alliance would radically change the context and likely implementation of climate action. We suggest that the AU and EU Commissions urgently work together to present to the AU-EU Summit in October a Political Declaration on a Climate Alliance along with proposals on what is needed to turn the Alliance into a practical reality.

## REVISED PRIORITIES WITHIN THE TFRA FOUR STRATEGIC AREAS OF ACTION

We have reviewed our original recommendations on the four strategic areas of action designed to transform Africa's agri-food sector and rural economy, to take account of the new context which now applies. We have tried to build on the strengths of the EU and its Member States programmes and experience in development cooperation with Africa. We set out our revised priorities below.

### A TERRITORIAL APPROACH FOR INVESTMENT, JOB CREATION AND INCOME GROWTH.

It is critically important to build African capacity in planning at national and regional level and in the identification of local action programmes. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the relevance of local assessments and rapid local answers. This will involve strengthening African local institutions for improved participation, economic and social networks, reinforcing peer to peer cooperation via farmers' organisations, cooperatives and business federations, as ways to develop sustainable functional territories.

Enhanced investments, including in the key infrastructures of electricity and the internet, and the key services for people and businesses require a sort of 'territorial pact' between public and private investors interested in better resilience and sustainability of specific food systems. New financial mechanisms are needed to reduce the investment risk associated with the agri-food sector in low-income countries. This can be done by blending public and private finance, with the public sector providing seed capital to guarantee the private investment of a company or bank.

### SUSTAINABLE LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, AND CLIMATE ACTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the links between policies for food, health and climate. The WHO has developed the 'One Health' approach working on the connection between humans, animals, plants and their shared environments to prevent and control diseases circulating in animals and the environment and spilling over to human health. There is a strong case for formal partnerships at national and possibly regional level to implement this One Health approach.

We also propose:

- Increasing coherence between agriculture, climate, environment and land and natural resource management in Africa through improved production systems, including agro-ecology techniques.
- Mainstreaming land and natural resource management into economic activities, policies and programmes
- Adopting a food systems approach to strategy and governance and support for local stakeholders in conducting their food system analysis

- Supporting the use of Climate Financing (especially the Green Climate Fund) through decentralised funding mechanisms to benefit smallholders and help them adapt to and mitigate climate change
- Supporting the creation and maintenance of multi-purpose weather data across Africa as well as capacity building and open access digital agricultural extension services. West Africa and the Sahel region have a strong case for priority investment in this field.

## SUPPORT THE SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION OF AFRICAN AGRICULTURE

In spite of the many challenges caused by COVID-19 since early 2020, the African agri-food sector has shown resilience, creativity and determination. Food supply chains, although under pressure, have remained operational. However, we believe that the following measures should now be supported for the ongoing protection of food and nutrition security and livelihoods in both rural and urban communities:

- Investing in protecting and supporting food supply chains for fresh products which are becoming more expensive because of the impact of COVID-19. Shorter supply chains, based on a territorial approach, can increase the resilience of local food systems to international shocks and support their development.
- Supporting financial liquidity within the rural economy, through building linkages between financial institutions, technical assistance providers and cooperatives, SMEs and farmers' organizations. Financial incentives will unlock private sector lending for working capital requirements of end-users.
- Providing accessible technical assistance for production improvement, financial management, business planning, governance and controls to cooperatives and SMEs.
- Using current opportunities to enhance digitalisation within the agri-food sector and rural economy, using information systems for technical advice and e-commerce possibilities to improve the functioning of the supply chain and directly engaging with consumers.
- We note the establishment of the AU/FAO Task Force on the impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition (May 2020) [\(10\)](#). We are acutely aware of the importance of coordination and effective planning in an era of restricted resources and the range of demands on these resources. EU/AU actions for the agri-food sector and rural economy should take account of the planning and directions emerging from the AU/FAO Task Force.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE AFRICAN FOOD INDUSTRY AND FOOD MARKETS

The TFRA report stated that the increase in African food demand is a major opportunity for the continent's food industry. But that opportunity can only be realised if the constraints to competitiveness, inadequate levels of investment, low levels of value chain organisation and value-added, little export diversification and barriers to expanding trade, can be overcome. African intra-regional trade is way below its potential. Measures to improve the situation could

be early steps towards the larger and longer term vision envisaged in the realisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and eventually an Africa-EU free trade zone.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted a number of weaknesses discussed in the TFRA report. We believe that the following measures are now appropriate to address these weaknesses:

- Food production, marketing and distribution should be declared as 'essential services', alongside health, and part of economic infrastructure, ensuring the protection of workers within the food system, and keeping trade corridors open between countries.
- Efforts to promote intra-African trade should be further encouraged. Common actions across countries should be prioritised with the objective of maintaining the flow of goods and services, stabilizing and re-opening markets. The use of locally produced food and the consumption of regional food staples should be encouraged.
- Food safety, as part of the One Health approach, and the governance of food safety should be strengthened. The AU and EU should examine the feasibility of designating food safety governance as a priority issue within the Africa EU partnership we recommend to support the development of Africa's agri-food sector and rural economy.

## CONCLUSION

The TFRA report, published in March 2019, was framed against the reality of Africa's huge challenge in creating sufficient jobs and income to meet the needs of its population, projected to double over the next thirty years. We took inspiration from the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs, proposed in 2018 by EU Commission President Juncker, aimed at creating up to 10 million jobs in the next five years.<sup>(11)</sup> We stated that we saw Africa as a continent of opportunity, notwithstanding its many challenges, with the fastest growing population in the world, expanding markets, abundant natural resources and a culture with much to offer Europe and the world. We stressed the critical importance of transforming Africa's agri-food sector and rural economy as part of a wider economic transformation. We suggested that an innovative partnership between Africa and Europe, based on continuing progress in policy coherence for development (PCD), operating at the three levels of people to people, business to business and government to government, should play a critical role in that transformation, through a renewed multi-stakeholder dialogue fostering innovation.

Eighteen months on from the publication of our report, these population realities have not changed. We believe that our recommendations remain relevant and valid. But since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has set in train a health crisis with huge economic consequences. Year by year, the climate emergency becomes more stark and existential. We have updated our recommendations to address this new context.

The current unprecedented global health and economic challenges requires an equivalent response from the international community. Yet the existing geopolitical situation, with tensions rising between major players, trade disputes, and restriction of movement across borders, illustrates the difficulties in developing and implementing such a collective response. The traditional donors of development assistance must rebuild their economies and some have reduced their budgets for development cooperation. There will need to be fundamental re-thinking about how economies and societies will organise in a post-COVID-19 world.

The AU-EU Summit in October 2020 thus takes on a wider significance beyond agreeing the basis of a future relationship between the two continents. The Summit will be held one week in advance of the US Presidential election, the outcome of which will significantly influence the possibilities of having an effective multilateral response to the multiple global crises likely in the years ahead. The Summit has the opportunity to develop a vision and generosity of spirit that will underpin future relationships between Africa and Europe. It can also begin a process of articulating how both continents, separately and in partnership, can contribute to an effective multilateral response to global challenges and the current COVID-19 pandemic. We wish the leaders well in their efforts.

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