

FAO Main Message on Africa: Policy Options to Expedite Implementation

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1. The recent food crisis that followed the global escalation of food prices, revealed the precarious state of food security in most African countries which cannot withstand the slightest external shock. This has resulted in political instability in a number of countries. The crisis has further underscored, as witnessed at the CSD-16, the crucial importance of addressing both the short-term social protection needs and the long-term development challenges to ensure that Africa achieves the MDG-1 target to reduce the number of hungry people by half by 2015.

2. The most crucial step in addressing the long-term food security challenges in Africa is achieving a breakthrough in the productivity of agriculture. Africa is the only region in the world in which the average per capita food production has been consistently falling for the last 40 years. If current food crises and trends persist, the number of undernourished people in the continent will increase sharply between now and 2015. Reversing this trend and charting the continent on a path to sustainable food security, will require a context-specific Green Revolution. In this respect, there are some specific lessons to be learned from the Asian experience especially in the areas of water control, of infrastructure development and the development of yield-enhancing technologies. For example, Africa has only seven percent of its arable land irrigated (three percent in sub-Saharan Africa) against 40 percent in Asia. Experience also shows that investments in integrated water development that allows for multiple uses, such as domestic water supply, irrigation, and other farm and non-farm utilization of water resources, has much greater impact in poverty reduction.

3. Improving soil fertility (using both chemical fertilizer and organic source) is another important entry point for increasing agricultural productivity. The current rate of fertilizer application in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), around 10 kg per hectare, is far from adequate to support a reasonable level of productivity. The African Fertilizer Summit held in Abuja, Nigeria in 2006 (sponsored by the recently formed Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa – AGRA members), called on the African Union member states to increase the level of usage of fertilizers to an average of at least 50 kg/ha by 2015. However, application of higher levels of chemical inputs alone does not guarantee improved fertility, as there are a number of soil health elements (soil organic matter, soil physical properties and nutrient balance) that require a holistic and sustainable land management approach.

4. Africa needs its own Green Revolution, given its diversity in agro-ecology, farming systems and the underpinning socio-economic conditions. The major focus of Green Revolutions in other parts of the world (rice and wheat) has to be broadened to include other food crops such as sorghum, millet, cassava and root crops, which are very important staple crops in Africa. The Green Revolution also needs to focus on the development of early maturing and drought-tolerant crops to ensure stabilization of production in a smallholder setting.

5. A successful Green Revolution will depend on strong programmes of national and international public sector research that require long-term funding. Returns on investments in

agricultural research and technology generally exceed 30% per year and their impact on poverty reduction has been impressive in both developed and developing countries (notably Asia). ECOSOC recommends increasing national expenditures in research and technology to at least one percent of GDP. Agricultural development also suffers from weak linkages between research, extension and farmers and lack of adequate funding for staff and programmes. The progressive shift in the agricultural research and technology development and transfer paradigm should be pursued: from a single commodity and mono-disciplinary base to a farming system and a multidisciplinary based approach; from a top-down extension model to a participatory approach to technology assessment and adoption; as well as greater efforts to improve the productivity and efficiency of women farmers.

6. Increased agricultural productivity needs to go together with improved storage, value addition marketing and distribution. High price volatility has contributed to low income and discouraged farmers from investing in agriculture. Farm-gate prices are often too low to cover production costs in many rural areas of Africa. There is a severe shortage of rural infrastructures in Africa and investment covering rural roads, markets, storage, processing and packing facilities is essential. Post-harvest losses, for example, account for 30-40 percent of some of the crops in SSA. Mobilizing local and community labour would contribute to cover part of the cost of these infrastructure works. Since agriculture alone is not enough to sustain livelihoods for the growing rural population, policies and institutions should also support and promote processing and marketing activities as part of a strategy aimed at developing the non-farm sector and generating employment outside agriculture.

7. There is also the critical issue of whether increased food production can be sustained in Africa in the face of competition from producers and exporters in other, particularly developed, countries that benefit from subsidies and protection. Moreover, small farmers continue to produce the bulk of Africa's traditional export crops such as cocoa, coffee, cotton and tea, and they participate in high-value exports as out-growers and suppliers of hired labour. Nevertheless, the return from producing export crops has remained low and volatile due to oversupply and shrinking margins (in the case of traditional exports) and fierce competition as well as high safety and marketing standards with regard to non-traditional exports. The price decline and volatility has worsened in recent years. For example, coffee prices declined by two-thirds between 1995 and 2002, whereas cotton and sugar lost about half of their 1995 value.

8. The recent High Level Ministerial Declaration on African Agriculture in the 21st Century that was held in Windhoek, Namibia (9-10 February 2009) stressed the need to promote Africa's international trade, including through regional integration and greater integration into the global economy and fulfilment of the commitment to a well-functioning, universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system which promotes sustainable development. International trade would have a positive impact only if policies and programmes are put in place to help increase agricultural productivity and product quality, and create appropriate market and trade institutions in order to raise competitiveness and ensure fairness in domestic and international markets. African countries should also pay particular attention to high cross-border transaction costs in regional trade. Regional trade in agricultural products (e.g. cereals, livestock products, fish and fishery products and forest products) offers considerable opportunities in achieving food security and alleviating poverty.

9. Institutions and governance issues play a critical role in Africa's development. Notwithstanding the fact that institutions played a decisive role in facilitating development in

the now developed or emerging countries, they are generally weak and ineffective in many parts of Africa. A pro-poor and environmentally sustainable African Green Revolution also requires a well-functioning public sector, strong and active farmer organizations at all levels (local and national), a vibrant private sector and effective administration and fiscal decentralization, which should be given a priority by African governments and their development partners.

10. Aware of the need to take urgent action to address the main challenge of agricultural development in the continent, African Heads of States and Governments adopted the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in July 2003, which embraced the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) under NEPAD (prepared jointly by FAO and the NEPAD Secretariat) and committed themselves to allocating 10 percent of their budget to agriculture. Some countries (i.e. Malawi, Uganda, and Rwanda) have met the 10 percent target, while many countries have not done so. The commitment made by the international community at WSSD to provide additional resources for the implementation of NEPAD has not been met. There is an urgent need to reinvigorate support for increased investment in agriculture at both national and international levels.

11. Climate change in the twenty-first century is likely to bring about a new set of weather patterns and extremes that are well beyond what the local communities in Africa can cope with, especially when they face many non-climate constraints to meet the basic needs. Climate change is likely to reduce the length of growing seasons in much of SSA and could force some of the marginal agriculture (particularly in arid and semi-arid regions) out of production. Smallholders and the rural poor, whose livelihoods are most dependent on natural resources, will be the most vulnerable to climate change and variability. Support for a more focused research on moisture conserving and pest resistant crops; identifying and promoting location-specific adaptation practices and technologies and mainstreaming climate change issues into sectoral policies and national development plans will increasingly be important. Several African countries have formulated the National Adaptation Plan of Action for Climate Change (NAPA), but there is a serious limitation of funding available for its implementation. Hence, there is an urgent need for increased financial assistance, technology transfer and capacity-building to address the additional burden and challenges posed by climate change to African agriculture and development.