
AUDA-NEPAD and COVID-19 response to Food Insecurity and Malnutrition

Africa has a population of 1,288 billion of which 277 million were in severe food insecurity, and 676 million were moderately food insecure¹ in 2018 (FAO – State of Food Security and Nutrition 2019). This implies that most Africans (74%) are moderately or severely food insecure. More dramatically, these figures have increased by 31% for the severe food insecurity and by 22% for the moderate one since 2014. Furthermore, undernourishment remains of highest prevalence on the continent, affecting 21% of the population, in 2018.

Unlike the common risk factors threatening food and nutrition security related to droughts, floods, crop pests (fall army worm among others) and livestock diseases, locust invasion; volatility in output market prices; the current pandemic of COVID-19 is a disaster risk which threatens lives and disrupt livelihoods. It brings the global economy to a standstill and will have long term negative impacts on entire food systems, from producers, to processors, distributors and consumers.

Most African countries were already experiencing food shortages, food insecurity, poor nutrition concerns and are now disproportionately exposed to threats of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no doubt that life has changed drastically since the global outbreak. Ultimately, its impact on human lives is already immeasurable especially in Africa where nearly a third of its entire population is already undernourished. The expected negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic to economies, livelihoods, health, nutrition and the abrupt disruption of food systems and supply chain systems cannot be overemphasized.

If these negative impacts are not addressed effectively, this would bring many challenges on human capital development which is realised through sufficient availability and access to food rich in vital nutriment for better immune systems to fight against diseases such as COVID-19. The COVID-19 is rather unique compared to previous disasters, epidemics and pandemics – in both its infection rates and subsequent fatalities on a global scale. .

The present COVID-19 pandemic health crisis has already impacted negatively on agricultural production in many places, disrupted food systems, food supply chains and thus, global agricultural productivity and food security are foreseen to be trending downward. Consequently, around the world, many countries are already taking extraordinary measures to not only tackle the COVID-19 pandemic but also ensuring their food security and nutrition sovereignty. As such, food surplus countries are already implementing restrictive policies to limit food exports, to ensure they meet local food demand. Therefore, strengthening and integrating Regional and National Food Systems through facilitation of cross-border trade is critical in eradicating food insecurity and malnutrition in the African continent. Furthermore, achieving these objectives will go through the

¹ Definition of moderate food insecurity : people who do not have regular access to nutritious and sufficient food, even if they are not necessarily suffering from hunger. Severe food insecurity affects people who have access to reduced quantity of food to the extent that they are possibly experiencing hunger (FAO, 2019).

implementation of appropriate tools and policy instruments to address the variety of already existing risks related to agriculture, food and nutrition insecurity.

To date, the impact of COVID-19 on the nutrition status in the African Union (AU) member states is not yet well known or documented. It is expected that increased job instability will translate into income loss and negatively affect food access, resulting in poorer nutrition intake. The proven track records and experiences from major disease outbreak such as; HIV/AIDS, Ebola, SARS, MERS has impacted negatively on food security, particularly, in the affected countries or regions of Africa where malnutrition rates are already high rendering the populations weak with compromised immune systems.

The present COVID-19 pandemic is beyond just a global health crisis, and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), guided by its mandate, is playing a role in assessing the COVID-19 pandemic and responding to its impending impact on African economies, livelihoods, food and nutrition security and associated productivity at the continental, regional, national and sub-national levels. In the COVID-19 Strategy, account should also be taken of recurring challenges in Africa, such as prolonged droughts, the fall army worm (FAW) across the continent and threats posed by the locust invasion currently dominant in East Africa. Furthermore, these crises are adding further strain to already strained economies and food systems, across Africa.

AUDA-NEPAD phased approach to Response to Covid19 includes ensuring the prevention of further spreading and contamination to save lives in the emergency phase. In the medium term, responses are geared towards preparing to support recovery and rehabilitation of livelihoods that are currently being disrupted. . It adopts a multisectoral approach integrating health, education, energy and food security interventions, with the implication of a broad range of stakeholders available to deliver these interventions on the ground. . Dealing with this crisis, therefore offers an opportunity to reorient and rebalance policies and support local actions which can bring together key sectors, promote sustainable food production, ensure social justice, reduce prevalence of undernourishment, sustain school feeding programs, and overall accelerate the transition to more resilient and sustainable food systems on the continent.

Strengthening and integrating National and Regional Food Systems was already high on the Agenda of African countries with the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), as it is critical step in eradicating food insecurity and malnutrition on the African continent. Achieving these objectives will go through the implementation of appropriate tools and policy instruments to address the variety of risks related to agriculture and food insecurity, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic which adds additional pressure and stress on African Countries' agriculture and food systems, thus their food security and nutrition efforts.

While mitigating against the present global health crisis and the associated socio-economic impacts in Africa, the AUDA-NEPAD is re-programming and refocusing on practical interventions to support the AU Member States in strengthening and sustaining their agriculture, nutrition and food systems. Delivering jointly with partners, AUDA-NEPAD aims to strengthen the AU Member States ongoing programmes of social protection including safety nets, food supply

chains and support smallholder farmers' ability to stabilise food production and productivity. To diminish the looming disruptions of COVID-19 threats to both regional and national food supply chains, AUDA-NEPAD is working with the AU Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to sustain cross border trade movement of food and agricultural commodities while ensuring compliance with existing food control systems in place and food safety standards. In addition, AUDA-NEPAD is mobilizing all its key strategic partners including the African Union Member States, RECs, Academia, Civil societies, Communities and development partners. The immediate interventions will be concentrated around the following deliverables:

- Develop and/or strengthen the availability of credible data/information and knowledge systems on food and nutrition security status to allow for evidence-based planning, programming and tracking of actions and results. This will be done mainly through a vulnerability assessment system for food and nutrition security in the face of the COVID-19 threats to monitor vulnerability hotspots to anticipate crises and effectively coordinate responsive mechanism.
- Accelerate deployment of social protection instruments such as food safety nets, inclusive of food aid / food vouchers for improved nutrition and food security.
- Deployment of solar PV power systems to provide a sustainable, reliable and affordable power supply to light up vulnerable health care facilities and communities, thereby ensuring continuity of health services and building productive and resilient capacity.
- Support the provision of sufficient potable water supplies and sanitation facilities in vulnerable communities.
- Support provision of food parcels/basket to the most vulnerable including school going children who rely on daily school meals.
- Provide vulnerability assessment system for food and nutrition security in the face of the COVID-19 threats to monitor vulnerability hotspots to anticipate crises and effectively coordinate responsive mechanism.
- Strengthen nutrition education and knowledge, as well as capacity building for service providers across multiple sectors.
- Coordinate with the private sector food industries to guide them to produce and supply healthy diversified nutritious food commodities to the consumers.
- Coordinate and enhance regional food storage capabilities in the face of COVID-19 threats. This work will be delivered with regional economic communities to optimize the availability of food and elimination of measures that would restrict trade and mobility of commodities; while reducing food waste and losses; improve logistics – transport of food between countries. .
- Deployment of innovative food and feed production technologies, to increase food and feed production in the vulnerable communities. Key technologies are hydroponic and aquaponics for food and feed production.

- Provide timely information through regular engagement, updates/outlooks on food and nutrition security for the regions/RECs.

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