

Summary report on AUDA-NEPAD and RECs COVID-19 Response on Nutrition and Food Systems Webinar

May 20, 2020

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) shutdowns have disrupted the food systems and exacerbated the situation of available resources, for poor households and communities. The need for nutritious food for vulnerable households, in both rural and urban Africa, during the lockdowns, needs to be addressed comprehensively with multisectoral approaches. And with a sense of immediacy.

On May 20th, 2020, AUDA-NEPAD convened the first series of Nutrition and Food Systems Webinar with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). With over 60 participants from the RECs, AUC, IFPRI, FAO, WFP, partners including academia, private sector, NGOs, journalists and other nutrition experts, the Webinar sought to share information on how COVID-19 was being addressed by the RECS and the African Union to support what member states are doing. The Webinar also critically looked at and discussed contextualized immediate and future actions needed by RECs and countries. Moderated by [A4NH/IFPRI](#) Addis Ababa Office, and a welcome note by the AUDA-NEPAD Supervisor of Human Capital Institutional Development (HCID), technical presentations were received from the RECs (AMU¹, COMESA², EAC³, ECOWAS⁴, SADC⁵, ECSA⁶-Health AUC-DSA and AUC-DREA, Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, and AUDA-NEPAD,. In addition, the RECs shared their developed COVID-19 Regional Response plans which were also presented.

Discussion points

Responding effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic has proven a challenge due to resource constraints and limited data since there is so much that is still unknown. But countries must still act to mitigate both against infection and to minimize related economic, food security and nutrition challenges.

Nutrition underpins 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reflected in AU Agenda 2063 - Goal number 3 which is: **Healthy and Well Nourished Citizens**. Thanks to recent numerous global events, nutrition continues to remain high on the development agenda with government leaderships paying more attention, although more should be done. AUDA-NEPAD fully aligns with the fact that nutrition is a priority, especially in times of COVID1-19.

¹ Arab Maghreb Union (UMA)

² Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

³ East African Community (EAC)

⁴ Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

⁵ Southern African Development Community (SADC)

⁶ East, Central, Southern Africa (ECSA) Health Community

The AU COVID-19 Ministers of Agriculture Declaration and the AUDA-NEPAD White Paper plus existing instruments on nutrition and food systems were referenced as valuable points of departure <https://www.nepad.org/event/auda-nepad-and-recs-covid-19-response-nutrition-and-food-systems-20-may-2020-0900am-gtm>

Some RECs and several countries on the continent have already developed COVID-19 Response Plans while the remaining RECS are in the process of doing for. These plans are factoring in agriculture, food systems and nutrition amongst other sectoral priorities and interlinkages and include aspects on targeted social COVID-19 funds, agriculture grants and credits, facilitating movement of food and other essential goods across borders, guidelines on cross border trade, M&E reporting, establishment of food reserves, and strengthening of school feeding (nutrition and health) and other vulnerable group feeding programmes and schemes. But resource constraints are significant.

A concern and important point raised was the need to address informal markets, hygiene, and food safety especially in settings where there is limited access to water, hygiene and sanitation, and lack of guidelines or regulations that support sale of food products through the informal sector – which forms a significant component of Africa’s food trade. There is need to find effective and efficient way to address informal food markets. Alongside this the need for accountability for nutrition, which remains weak across sectors, was raised.

In crafting their COVID-19 response plans and actions, the RECs echoed that the approaches must be coordinated with Member States, contextualized and coherent to needs. It is important to build on good practices and lessons from the past. Some emphasis was also placed on the post COVID-19 actions, moving from emergency to long term development mode. this needs to be an important part of the response. Utilizing cost/investment frameworks for nutrition for the short and long term to address both nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive actions was highlighted.

Challenges and opportunities

The RECs reported and shared similar issues on the challenges and opportunities for nutrition, the least of which being that most countries are starting on an already shaky ground as malnutrition rates and food insecurity were already high. Some of the challenges include nonuniformity of guidelines, especially for trade, trade flow restrictions, outbreak of drought locusts, limited data, poor capacities, limited resources and prioritization of nutrition concretely.

While the challenges may appear daunting, there are silver linings in the horizon that present opportunities to exploit. These include strengthening research, data collection, analysis and use; improving on knowledge products and guidance; building required capacities; engaging more and better with the Continental COVID-19 Task Force; improve on private participation; expand on digital technology use for e.g. clearance of goods at borders; strengthen intersectoral planning, communications and coordination. COVID-19 also grants an

opportunity to revamp the information and early warning systems to better deal with for instance the droughts, locust invasions, army worm etc.

Take-home messages and way forward

- COVID-19 and Nutrition have a complex and direct relationship, one can cause or exacerbate the other, hence nutrition and food systems should be front and centre
- Good data are required for better targeting and follow up of COVID-19 cases, particularly from the Member States.
- More resource allocations and capacities are critical for nutrition considerations. This goes especially for school meals and other vulnerable group food parcels' provision.
- Provision of access to water, sanitation, and good hygiene should be an integral part of the package.
- There will be follow up Webinars on Nutrition and Food Systems convened by the RECs and by AUDA-NEPAD, AUC as well partners.
- AUDA-NEPAD Community of Practice (CoP) shall be set up as a platform to continue learning, exchanging a reporting on progress on the continent vis-à-vis COVID-19 Nutrition and Food Systems.
- A resource document will be developed based on the discussions of the webinar to which other could contribute. This can help with a synthesis of useful information and references that the RECs could use to inform the COVID-19 response plans and other mitigation efforts.