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Status of food security in Africa

Executive Summary and key messages

Committed to improving the lives of billions of people, the world leaders, including African Heads of State and Government, adopted in 1996 a daunting resolution, well known as the Rome Declaration, to half the absolute number of undernourished people by 2015. This commitment was made to deal with development challenges with a view to eradicating poverty and hunger, and eventually reaching higher development milestones. It is essential, eighteen years after the Declaration, to take stock of Africa's progress. The commitment was further reinforced by adopting the Millennium Development Goals, including those on halving the proportion of poverty and hunger by 2015. It is the aim of this report to review the progress made to date, toward achieving the goal of halving hunger in African countries. It goes beyond reviewing food and nutrition insecurity status to reviewing the root causes of the present food and nutrition insecurity on the continent. The report ends by formulating pragmatic, action-oriented policy options.

The report tells a mixed story of successes and failures. Irrespective of the long-standing recognition of access to food as a right, food security is still not universally treated as a basic human right on the continent. Africa has made a marked improvement in food security, however, a lot remains to be done and serious challenges still need to be met if food insecurity is to be eradicated. Africa, notwithstanding its immense natural resources, is the world's most food insecure continent. Around 227 million people, or one out of every five people in Africa, are chronically food insecure. In fact, compared to the rest of the world, while Africa hosts around 15 per cent of the world's populations, it is home to approximately one third of those affected by hunger, on a global level.

Out of the 54 African Union countries, only three countries have managed to achieve the stringent goal of halving the number of hungry people. Overall, the continent is not on track toward achieving the 1996 World Food Security target. Indeed, the number of undernourished has increased rather than decreased by around 25 per cent since 1990. While considering the less ambitious target, which is the 2001 Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of hungry people in the total population of 1990 level by 2015, African countries have done better with the target being already reached in 14 countries. Africa as a whole, has already failed to achieve Millennium Development Goal one, experiencing a decline of merely 26 per cent in the prevalence of undernourishment over the period 1990–2014.

To capture the complexity and multidimensionality of food security, the four defined food insecurity dimensions are considered. In this regard, the continent portrays a mixed picture showing a relatively modest improvement on the availability side, with little progress if any, on the other dimensions. It could be understood (with a little caution), due to varying country specificities, that the source of undernourishment could be attributed to weak distribution or lack of economic access, or both. As the region has been experiencing little progress in the vulnerability dimension of food security, climate change is anticipated to put a severely, negative cast on the continent's capacity to fight against hunger in the years to come.

The report affirms the commitment, commendable efforts, and the notable progress that has been achieved in recent years. Nevertheless, the continent needs to continue to work rigorously toward ensuring food and nutrition security, and improving livelihoods through rethinking the commitment, approach and modality. Given the wide range of hurdles the continent faces, African countries need (if eradication of food insecurity is really sought) to make a sustainable, long-term political commitment. In doing so, African countries must ensure political stability, building effective institutions, interlinked with supporting policies, macroeconomic and pro-poor policies, a comprehensive approach that tackles food security through a multisectoral orientation and in the broader scope of rural and agricultural transformation; and regional integration, and improved investment climate and investment levels. As for the short term, African countries should consider programmes that deliver quick results, notably measures to improve access to food through social programmes. Though it is regrettable that the Millennium Development Goal of halving hunger in the region cannot be realized by end of 2015, proper policy actions – that are based on the realities of African countries' food insecurity – should come quickly and be implemented swiftly to tackle the current bold target of ending hunger by 2025, before it is too late!

I. Introduction

A. Background and rationale

1. At the World Food Summit in 1996, the heads of 185 countries reaffirmed, in the Rome Declaration on World Food Security, that: “We, the Heads of State and Government...reaffirm the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger.” The world leaders also stated their wish to “reduce hunger and poverty by half by 2015” as part of the development goals for the new millennium. In addition, the first principle of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme – Pillar III Framework for Africa’s Food Security stated: “Protect the right to food for all citizens of Africa”.

2. The right to food is fundamentally based on the perception that food, or indeed nutritious food, is an essence of life and a necessity that cannot be denied or deprived of, for the very basic reason that humans cannot survive without food. Working toward fulfilling the right to food, through the provision of the food at the right quantity and quality to all people at all times, places all concerned in a position of high moral ground and responsibility. It is, therefore, the primary responsibility of each State to ensure that every man, woman and child under its jurisdiction, alone or in a community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to sufficient, nutritious food.

3. Food and nutrition security is of particular importance in the case of Africa, where human capital gain will help sustainably consolidate the economic growth and, consequently, development. The damage afflicted by Africa’s economies as an outcome of food and nutrition insecurity in the past and present has hampered the continent’s full economic and social potential. A recent study by the African Union Commission, the World Food Programme and ECA (2013) shows that African countries bear enormous economic and social costs of child undernutrition at the individual and community level, in terms of losses in individual physical and cognitive capacity. With regard to the economy and society as a whole, the impact is less understood. The study did, however, attempt to assess the cost of hunger in monetary values, in a number of African countries. Estimates show that child stunting could cause the economies a loss in the tone of 2.5 per cent to 16 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

4. In the African context, food and nutrition insecurity is essentially a phenomenon that is closely linked to poverty, underperforming agriculture and food shortage. Africa, the world’s poorest region, is set to register the largest sum of population growth between 2013 and 2050, with around 40 per cent of the world’s population growth to emerge from Africa. Africa’s population is projected to increase to 2.4 billion by 2050, up from around 1.1 billion from 2013, and the bulk of this growth is expected to occur in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa (Population Reference Bureau, 2013). Intertwined to the population growth is the unprecedented, rapid urbanization that is largely composed of a middle-class population and young people. This rise of the middle class is expected to change food consumption patterns towards new dietary habits, including ready-made, package food (cereals, meats and dairy products), and more consumption of dairy and animal products away from traditional staples.

B. Objectives

5. The overall objective of this report is to supply evidence to African policymakers on the status of food and nutrition through providing data-driven analysis of the region’s

recent progress in food and nutrition security. The report aims at flagging the urgency of prioritizing and institutionalizing the right to food. It also hopes to raise awareness of the urgency of rethinking strategies to achieving food and nutrition security, given the present state of hunger and the renewed and bold commitments made to eradicating hunger and substantially reducing child undernutrition in Africa by 2025.

6. Specifically, the report will present an updated review of the status of food and nutrition security in Africa based on a laconic analysis using most recent and available data, research results and findings. It outlines the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity in the region. It further highlights the political commitments made, notably at a continental level, to enhance food and nutrition security with a view to assessing the feasibility of achieving these commitments vis-à-vis current conditions, including resource availability and current challenges.

C. Structure and organization of the report

7. The report starts with a section that provides justification and elaboration on the purpose of the report, and its scope and methodology. The second section provides an updated review of the status of food and nutrition security in Africa. It presents trends and changes in each of the four dimensions of food security, nutrition-related indicators, food trade, and food aid dependency in Africa. Section three highlights the main causes behind and forces of the widely observed deteriorated status of food security on the continent. The commitments that have been made by African leaders as food and nutrition security concern in 2014 will be highlighted in section four. This section questions the feasibility of meeting these commitments and, consequently, explores required key policy priorities. The report concludes by formulating a set of pragmatic, results-oriented policy options to help pave the way for the region in general, and its member States in specific, to better deal with the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity, in a comprehensive and sustainable manner.

II. State of food and nutrition security in Africa

A. Food security

8. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the World Food Programme's 2014 data estimates indicate that about 805 million people, representing around 11.3 per cent of the global population, are projected to be food insecure (e.g. undernourished). This represents some improvement, which has translated into lifting more than 37 million people out of chronic food insecurity compared to the period 2011–2013. In Africa, and in particular south of the Sahara, although progress has been slow, the prevalence of undernourishment over the period 2012–2014 stood at 20.55 per cent, representing a decline of about 26 per cent since 1990–1992. As for Africa south of the Sahara, the progress was even better with hunger, which declined by 28.5 per cent over the same period.

9. Food security refers here to a situation “when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”, as stated in the 2006 Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security. As the Declaration revealed, measuring the prevalence of undernourishment cannot be sufficient to capture the complexity and multidimensionality of food security. Accordingly, in analysing the food insecurity on the continent, the following four defined food security dimensions are

considered: availability of – and economic and physical access to – food, food utilization and stability (vulnerability and shocks) over time. Each dimension will be described by specific indicators, at both process and output levels as much as possible.¹

Food availability

10. The availability dimension captures not only the quantity, but also the quality and diversity of food. In Africa, the average dietary energy supply adequacy² has increased by about 8.41 per cent since the period 1990–1992, though it has remained stagnant since 2009–2011, albeit unevenly and at below the average for all developing regions. The overall energy supply adequacy average for Africa, 116 per cent, indicates (generally speaking) a sufficient level of food supply, which has significantly contributed to reducing the prevalence of malnutrition in Africa. However, these figures are mainly based on national averages and do not reflect food availability at household and individual levels.

11. The overall performance in food supply masks significant variation among countries, both in terms of food supply adequacy and pace of progress. While some countries have succeeded to increase food supply by 20–61 per cent, others have experienced a decline ranging between 1 and 12 per cent, since the period 1990–1992. Also, food supply adequacy varies significantly among countries ranging between 92 and 152 per cent.

12. Africa south of the Sahara remains the most affected region in terms of sufficient dietary food supply. In contrast, Northern Africa has a dietary supply adequacy that is even higher than that of developed countries. The average dietary food supply adequacy for the region, estimated at 110 per cent, is the world's lowest. This could, in part, be explained in view of the disproportional improvement of food production compared to population growth. The explosive population growth realized in sub-Saharan Africa, which resulted in a population increase of around 70 per cent over the period 1990–2012, has led to a modest increase in the average per capita value of food production, estimated at 13 per cent over the same period. Northern Africa, with a relatively modest population increase (42 per cent) over the same period, has witnessed an increase of 39 per cent in per capita value of food.

13. Alongside this increase in food supply at continental and national levels, there has been improvement in food diversity, resulting in a slight decrease of the share of dietary energy supply derived from cereals, roots and tubers; and an increase in the supply of proteins and an increase in per capita availability of fruits and vegetables, livestock products and vegetable oils (FAO, 2014).

14. Overall, the analysis of food availability trends in Africa indicates improvement, though quite modest, it suggests that observed food insecurity is primarily caused by the other dimensions of food security.

Access to food

15. With regard to the access dimension, which assesses both the physical and economic access to food, the situation in Africa, but in particular Africa south of the Sahara, has continued to be the greatest challenge in terms of achieving food security. Physical access to food in this particular region is complicated due to weak or inappropriate infrastructures such as poor roads, ports, communications, food storage

¹ Data are drawn mainly from the “Food Security Indicators”, and calculated by the author. Available from www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-fs/fs-data/en/. Accessed 15 October 2014.

² An indicator that measures adequacy of food supply in terms of calories, and helps in understanding whether undernourishment is mainly due to insufficient food supply or bad distribution.

facilities and other installations that facilitate the functioning of markets, particularly in rural areas.

16. According to the Statistical Yearbook for Africa of 2014, all, except for nine, African countries have road coverage lower than 14 km per 100 km² of land area and the percentage of paved roads ranges between 15 and 30 per cent; far behind the 45–60 per cent observed globally (FAO, 2014b). In some rural areas in Africa south of the Sahara, only 30 per cent of the populations live within 2 km of an all-season road, which is just over half the shares for Latin America and the Caribbean – 54 per cent, and South Asia – 58 per cent (United Nations Development Programme, 2012).

17. With regard to economic access, the domestic food price indicator³ is assessed in order to monitor regional food security. It showed relative food prices in Africa had increased on average by 19.1 per cent over the period 1990–2013, as compared to 15.3 per cent as an average in developing countries. Africa remains as the region with the highest relative food prices, almost 20 per cent higher compared to the relative price of food in developing countries. The high relative prices of food and the rapid pace of growth of food prices in Africa, indicate a high level of market inefficiency.

18. Notwithstanding impressive sustained economic growth over the past decade or so, per capita income has not changed significantly due, mainly, to more than a proportional increase in population growth. The per capita income in Africa increased by 40 per cent over the period 1990–2013, though still significantly low compared to that of developing countries, which had increased by a whopping 141 per cent over the same period. At the global level, African people have the lowest per capita income, \$4,622.5 at 2001 international prices. It is only 51 per cent of the average per capita income of developing countries, \$9,000 at 2001 international prices.

19. Even with Africa's recent economic growth and improvements in poverty reduction, the continent still has one of the highest levels of poverty, particularly in Africa south of the Sahara, with 60.5 per cent of the population living under \$2 a day in 2010.⁴ Significant disparity exists from one country to another with poverty prevalence, under \$1.25, ranging between 1.69 and 87.72 per cent (World Bank, 2014). The high level of poverty – coupled with high basic food prices, poor physical access, low human development, the high level of inequalities and inefficient preventive social protection mechanisms – have strongly affected production and purchase of food at the household level, therefore contributing to reduce access to food.

Food utilization

20. This dimension is assessed by the percentage of population that has access to essential services such as improved water sources, sanitation facilities and electricity. Proper food utilization implies that the food is handled, prepared, stored and eaten in a healthy environment. The outcomes of food utilization can be gauged through anthropometric measurements – underweight, stunting and wasting are usually the main nutritional disorders assessed.

21. In Africa, steady progress has been recorded in the reduction of the number of people without access to safe drinking water, improved sanitation and electricity over the past 20 years. Albeit, the proportion of population in Africa with no access to improved water and sanitation estimated at 68.6 per cent and 39.4 per cent, respectively, in 2012, is well below those in developing countries, 87.3 per cent and 57.4 per cent,

³ The domestic food price level index is an indicator of the relative price of food in a country. It is widely used for global monitoring of food security because it compares the relative price of food across countries and over time.

⁴ Calculated by using the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2014). Available from <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/poverty>. Accessed 18 September 2014.

respectively. It is well noted that the progress achieved masks significant variation among subregions and countries. At country level, while some countries have tripled the share of population with a reasonable access to safe water, some other countries have experienced a decline (FAO, 2014). Low access to these services impairs better utilization of food, thus aggravating food and nutrition insecurity on the continent.

Stability

22. It is extremely important that the three food security dimensions discussed above and their related indicators are stable over time, in order to ensure sustainable food security. Risks, including even short-lived crises, under these circumstances, could drive a vicious cycle including food insecurity. A number of indicators are used to measure exposure to risk. These include, the area equipped for irrigation, which provides a measure of the extent of exposure to climatic shocks such as droughts and heat waves; the share of food imports in total merchandise exports, which captures the adequacy of foreign exchange reserves to pay for food imports; and the cereal import dependency ratio, which measures the cereal self-sufficiency of a country and the potential impact of shocks in the international trade market.

23. From 2000 to 2012, there was no improvement in the percentage of arable land equipped for irrigation, with even a slight decrease (from 6 per cent to 5.7 per cent); while the cereal import dependency ratio worsened by 24 per cent, declining from 27.3 per cent to 31.7 per cent. As for the share of food imports in total merchandise exports, it declined from 13 per cent to 11 per cent, though highly fluctuating, over the period 1990–2011.

24. Africa's current shares of food imports in total merchandise and the cereal import dependency ratio were substantially and alarmingly high compared with 5 per cent and 15.7 per cent for the developing countries, respectively, over the same period of analysis (FAO, 2014). The dependency on cereals import has not been even in the region. While some countries have managed to abolish cereals import, reducing import dependency by almost 91 per cent, others have increased import dependency by seven times and more!

25. In 2000, Africa had the highest food price volatility on a global level – while, surprisingly, in 2013, Africa recorded the lowest as compared to the other regions of the world. Significant disparity is observed from one country to another. Alongside, the variation of the per capita net food production value is captured by the per capita food production variability index. In 1990, the variability of per capita production value in Africa was almost double that of developing countries but equal to the global production value. At country level, significant disparity exists among countries in terms of extent of production variation and trend. Price and production variability have severe impacts in Africa, whereby the 60 per cent of population are classified as poor whose expenditure on food amounts to around 60–70 per cent of total income (FAO, 2014; Smith, Alderman and Aduayom, 2006).

B. Nutrition security

26. A household is said to be food secure “if it can reliably gain access to food in sufficient quantity and quality for all household members to enjoy a healthy and active life” (Gillespie and Haddad, 2001). It is possible, however, for individuals in food-secure households to have deficient or unbalanced diets (Benson, 2004). As a result, malnutrition takes place if an individual's diet falls short of providing adequate calories and protein necessary for growth and maintenance.

27. To capture more fully the nutrition aspects of food security in terms of micronutrients deficiency, a number of nutrition-based indicators are analysed here. These are the prevalence of anaemia among children under 5 years of age, and the prevalence of anaemia in pregnant women (FAO, 2014). The prevalence of anaemia in pregnant women had steadily decreased by around 16 per cent over the period 1990–2011 to as low as 43.1 per cent, on average, in African countries. However, the prevalence of anaemia in pregnant women in Africa is still significantly high in comparison to Asia, 32.5 per cent. Similarly, the prevalence of anaemia among children has significantly fallen from as high as 70.8 per cent to as low as 58.3 per cent, though still unacceptably elevated, compared to Asia (36.1 per cent) or even North Africa (34.5 per cent). The disparity is also observed from one country to another with the prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women and children ranging between 28.4 and 63.5 per cent, and between 29.5 and 86.1 per cent, respectively.

28. Stunting, underweight and wasting has remained very prevalent among children under five years of age in Africa, particularly in Africa south of the Sahara where, in 2011, they represented the highest (39.6 per cent), the second highest (21.4 per cent) and the third highest (9.4 per cent) respectively, in the world (UNICEF, World Health Organization and World Bank, 2012). Recent data showed Africa to be the only continent with minimal changes in the prevalence of stunted children since 1990. The proportion of stunted children under 5 years of age in Africa had decreased from 42 per cent to merely 35 per cent, compared to 40 per cent to 25 per cent at the global level, between 1990 and 2012. Notwithstanding the drop in prevalence, the number of stunted children increased from 46 million to 59 million over the same period.

29. Large variations in prevalence in child stunted between countries exist, ranging between 15 and 58 per cent. Recent data shows that there are 16 countries on the continent with stunting rates above 40 per cent; 21 countries with stunting rates between 30 and 39.99 per cent, and 6 countries with stunting rates between 25 and 29.99 per cent, reaffirming the fact that a large proportion of Africa's population does not have access to food containing the essential vitamins and minerals required for optimum health and nutrition (UNICEF, 2014).

C. Food trade

30. Africa lost its status as a net exporter of agricultural products (food included) during the late 1970s and early 1980s when prices of raw commodities (mainly coffee, cocoa, and spices), which constituted the bulk of its agricultural export revenues, tumbled and local food production grew sluggishly. According to FAO⁵ data, since 1980, Africa's food import has grown consistently faster than export and reached a record high for the first time of around \$50 billion in 2008, at the height of the global economic crises, representing a deficit of about \$32 billion. Although food imports declined a year later, it has continued to rise steadily again since 2010.⁶ It is worth noting that six countries contribute around 75 per cent of Africa's total food import bill, a matter that should be taken into consideration. While food import bills vary significantly across Africa, only ten countries enjoy agricultural and food trade surplus.

31. Although Africa is a marginal player in global trade, representing only around 3.44 per cent of global agricultural exports in 2011 – marginally down from 3.66 per

⁵ FAOSTAT (Food and Agriculture Organization, Statistics Division). Available from <http://faostat3.fao.org/home/E>.

⁶ The deficit in Africa's food trade rose from \$32 billion in 2008 to about \$38 billion in 2011. These figures are often misquoted as Africa's food import bill, which is much higher. However, they represent the deficit in Africa's food import.

cent in 1990, the continent exports about a quarter of all agricultural products within its boundaries. Africa has demonstrated that under the right conditions, it can indeed boost intraregional trade. This is evident given the fact that for Africa's strategic food commodities (such as cereals, oils and fats, dairy, meat and meat products, sugar and beverages), intra-African trade over the past decade has ranged between 30 and 60 per cent as share of the continent's total agricultural exports. Evidence suggests that boosting intra-African trade, including establishing the Continental Free Trade Area, would improve the ability of African countries to supply a larger proportion of their domestic market from local sources, thereby improving self-sufficiency and thus, food security (ECA, 2014).

32. The high level of import dependency calls for the development of effective mechanisms to cope with the instability in external markets, including price fluctuation. Also, stabilizing food supply and prices through market-based risk management approaches and diversification programmes are key components of policies targeted at tackling this vulnerability.

III. Drivers of food and nutrition insecurity in Africa

33. Although food and nutrition insecurity is inevitably affected and framed by agricultural production, it should always be considered in the broader context of poverty. The bulk of farmers and pastoralists in Africa are vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity, not because they do not produce enough, but rather because they reserve little. They usually have negligible savings and limited other possible sources of income. This section is dedicated to answer the question on why there is food and nutrition insecurity on a continent that can feed itself. The driving forces behind food and nutrition insecurity are classified into three groups; biophysical, political and social, and economic drivers.

A. Biophysical drivers

1. Poor performance of agriculture

34. Generating a marketable surplus involves the materialization of complex trade-offs at the level of individual small-scale producers' factors of production and risks associated. The inherent complexity explains the graduality of the transition from subsistence to market-oriented agriculture and thus, the development of intermediary production systems. Though, transformation of agricultural production systems is intimately related to human and economic geography. This explains the critical role that market connections (physical infrastructures, institutions and services) play in the spatial configuration of markets and the development of production systems (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). The poor performance of African agriculture is attributed to a number of factors, including:

- (a) Undercapitalization of agriculture;
- (b) Inadequate funding of agricultural research and technology;
- (c) Inadequate use of yield-enhancing practices and technologies;
- (d) Low land and labour productivity;
- (e) Inadequate market access and infrastructure.

2. Fragile social and physical fabric, particularly in rural areas

35. Major parts of land area in Africa are classified as arable, semi-arable, and arid. The majority of the vulnerable poor concentrate in the arid and semi-arid ecosystems. Due to substantial population growth, those poor have been forced to intensively cultivate land, causing soil degradation rendering of low quality, with no capacity to replenish the soil. The United Nations Environment Programme (2008) has estimated that 60 per cent of Africa's farmland is degraded. In connection, most farm households have little land areas supporting, in most cases, extended families of about six to eight people. The unsustainable exploitation of the fragile ecosystem has exacerbated environmental degradation and low agricultural productivity, thus considerably contributing further to poverty and food insecurity.

3. Climate variability

36. Several parts of Africa are often exposed to natural disasters. The main natural hazard affecting African countries is drought (and floods) leading to chronic food insecurity. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the climate is becoming more unstable and the weather events more severe. People of the region have, therefore, developed specific coping strategies. However, even the most efficient coping mechanisms are rendered useless by an extended drought.

4. Water, land and energy stresses

37. As demand for cropland in Africa continues to rise due to a growing population, persistent land degradation continues to pose a daunting challenge. To make it worse, rising oil prices have also severely contributed to the increase in food prices, as documented by extensive research, and demand for land investments in sub-Saharan African countries, particularly for the production of biofuels.

38. With regard to water, there has been a steady increase in the demand for domestic and industrial water due to rapid population and economic growth. Also, rising urbanization, and changing life and food patterns have augmented water scarcity across much of the African countries. Water pollution and poor access to sanitation – especially in sub-Saharan Africa – have resulted in increased contamination of food and drinking water, leading to widespread diseases and decline in health levels impairing the capacity of food utilization.

B. Political and social drivers

1. Inequity, gender bias and limited social protection

39. The influence of political and social drivers on the food and nutrition security status is enormous. These are real factors that influence the day to day level of food and nutrition security. They include political instability, demographic change, urbanization, governance and international security, gender, issues of land tenure, changing patterns of consumer needs, preferences, choices, tastes, habits and practices, all of which affect the demand for and consumption of different foods. In Africa, rural women and men generally play different roles in guaranteeing food security for their households and communities. While men grow mainly field crops, women are usually responsible for growing and preparing most of the food consumed in the home and raising small livestock, which provides protein. But gender inequalities in control of livelihood assets limit women's food production.

2. **Political instability**

40. Internal or external armed conflict is one of the major factors in increasing people vulnerability on the continent. Evidence suggests that conflict and food insecurity are reciprocally related, with each prompting and strengthening the other. Because of conflicts, Governments are enforced to massively spend scarce resources on arms and conflict-related expenses. This has the result of discouraging development partners to avoid the risk of funding warfare instead of reducing poverty and food insecurity. In addition, the overall atmosphere renders it unsuitable for developing and implementing development programmes.

41. Unfortunately, Africa has long served prolonged, large-scale conflicts, particularly during the 1990s and 2000s. However, from 2011, Africa had (it would seem) returned to an era of internal political instability, which has shown its ugly face in a number of countries across the continent. This instability has severely affected food and nutrition insecurity (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2012).

C. **Economic drivers**

1. **Unstable global food markets**

42. Prices of food commodities on world markets have recently been on the rise with a high level of fluctuation. The persistent instability led to increased concern over the ability of the world food economy to adequately feed billions of people, now and in the future. While it is not possible to know with certainty the extent of future increases in either the level or volatility of prices, the risks of higher prices and greater volatility are sufficiently large to warrant serious efforts to understand what can be done to reduce the likelihood of increased prices or greater volatility, or to manage the consequences when these are unavoidable. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (2014b), the level and volatility of prices are the outcome of various forces that affect supply and demand – which is an important point to remember when considering the most appropriate options to counter high or volatile prices.

2. **Unfavourable macroeconomic policies and environment**

43. Farmers' communities not only suffer from fragile environments, poor standards of health and education, and inferior road and transportation services, but find themselves often living and working in an adverse economic and political environment. Such an environment has shown sustained bias towards urban dwellers and public budget, with agriculture being always considered as an endless source of public finance and revenue, and of cheap food commodities.

44. African economies are among the weakest economies in the world with a low gross national product. Economic growth has not increased significantly, on average, to compensate the high rate of population growth. The economies of the continent depend mainly on agriculture, which contributes around 25 per cent of African GDP.

3. **Poor access to food**

45. The past five years have been particularly challenging for Africa. Since 2008–2009, Africa suffered the severe effects of high food and fuel prices, which has impacted the ability of vulnerable communities to access food. An additional hurdle to improving the plight of those affected by undernutrition is to improve access to safe, adequate and nutritious food. Although certain regions in Africa have seen a substantial increase in production over the past 20 years, equal access to adequate and nutritious food remains a challenge.

IV. Food and nutrition-related political commitments and reality

A. Resolutions and declarations of the African Union Assembly in 2014

46. The African leaders have made several commitments in 2014, with a view to substantially reduce or eradicate hunger and malnutrition to achieve sustainable food security for all Africans. More recently, the Assembly of the African Union, at its session held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in June 2014, witnessed the issuance of a number of highly important declarations.

47. This Assembly made three historic declarations that will reframe the platform for efforts aimed at enhancing food and nutrition security for at least the upcoming 10 years. These declarations stipulated the bold targets to ending hunger and substantially reducing child stunting by 2025, and ending preventable child and maternal deaths by 2035.

1. Declaration on Nutrition Security for Inclusive Economic Growth and Sustainable Development in Africa

48. The Heads of State and Government committed to significantly lessening child stunting, bringing down stunting to 10 per cent and underweight to 5 per cent by 2025 and in particular, focusing on the first 1,000 days as the only window of opportunity during which permanent and irreversible physical and mental damage would be avoided.

2. Declaration on Ending Preventable Child and Maternal Death in Africa

49. The Heads of State and Government made a declaration to end preventable child and maternal death by the year 2035 in line with Post-2015 Framework on Sustainable Development.

3. Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods

50. The Heads of State and Government adopted a seven-item declaration. The declaration invited African countries to end hunger in Africa by 2025, resolving to, among others, accelerate agricultural growth by at least doubling current agricultural productivity levels by the year 2025, improve nutritional status with a view to bringing down stunting to 10 per cent and underweight to 5 per cent by 2025, and boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services resolving to increase it by triple, by the year 2025.

4. Decision on the Report of Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee on New Partnership for Africa's Development

51. Endorsing the conclusions of the thirty-first session of the Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee, the Assembly noted that in the face of globalization and its impact on food and nutrition security and livelihoods, Africa should embrace food sovereignty and regional trade preference strategies to attain food self-sufficiency and enhanced regional cooperation. Leaders, in this regard, urged the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Planning and Coordinating Agency, the African Union Commission and the regional economic communities to work with Member States to develop the requisite national and regional strategies, policies and programmes.

B. Eradicating food hunger in Africa by 2025, a dream or a hope? What is needed?

52. In July 2014, at the Assembly of the African Union in Malabo, the African Heads of State and Government declared a bold goal to end hunger on the continent by 2025. The declaration conveys a strong message to the African people and the world of the solid commitment towards ending hunger on the continent. The declaration is expected to strengthen efforts to enhance food security on the continent and, more importantly, to encourage the adoption of more integrated approaches toward ending hunger.

53. During the period 1990–2003, Africa had succeeded in reducing hunger by an annual average of around 0.85 per cent. Since the adoption of the Maputo Declaration in 2003, the performance has accelerated registering an annual growth of around 1.5 per cent, on average, since 2004. Nevertheless, to continue to progress at the current rate of around 1.5 per cent annually would not at all be sufficient to free Africa of hunger; it would only contribute to reducing hunger by merely 18 per cent (approximately) of the 2013 level by 2025. Africa would need to reduce hunger by around 8.3 per cent annually over the period 2014–2025, on average, holding other factors (such as population growth and consumption patterns) constant to reach the goal.

54. Continuing business as usual is certainly not an option, rather, adopting an aggressive, integrated and comprehensive approach is a must. In this regard, eradicating hunger would essentially require increasing the purchasing power of the poor – around 60 per cent of Africans live under \$2 a day, as well as substantially increasing food production. Increasing the average annual reduction of prevalence of malnutrition seven times as compared to the current rate, would require increasing food supply by seven times as compared to the current level. The question here is how African countries can achieve this.

55. For hunger to be eliminated sustainably in Africa by 2025, national Governments and development partners must devote adequate resources; implement concerted long-term integrated approaches across sectors, disciplines, actors and even countries through appropriate policies; implement a clear accountability system, enhance institutional capacity, and a transparent framework for partnership; and create an enabling environment for the private sector in order to raise sufficient investments. Certainly, the target is a massive, but not an impossible, challenge. Recent successful experiences of a number of developing countries, such as Brazil, China, Thailand and Vietnam, suggest that substantially accelerating the current pace of progress in enhancing food security would make it realistic to eradicate hunger. African countries need to make achieving this goal a top priority, given the damaging consequences of hunger for human development and for economic growth.

V. Recommended policy options

56. Recommendations, most pertaining to Africa's food and nutrition security, should be focused on the need to support poor smallholder farmers to boost agricultural productivity and withstand future shocks so that it contributes to long-term food and nutrition security, and to shore up households' access to sufficient, health food all the time.

A. Continental and regional levels

57. The following recommendations were made:

(a) Establish regional agricultural trade cooperation, in the fields of investment, technology transfer, and commodities trade, in the regional economic communities and between the regional economic communities. This implies a win-win situation, whereby a country or a subregion can benefit from the high technology, capital surplus and huge food export markets that other countries or subregions possess – and in turn, each will benefit from stable, consistent, relatively cheap food supplies derived from the extra food surplus to be realized in the other complementary producing countries or subregions;

(b) Eliminate all barriers to intra-African trade to realize the full potential to enhance food self-sufficiency on a subregional basis, and to link regional food security and social protection efforts to trade. Boost intraregional trade through investments in cross border infrastructures, and better harmonization and coordination of trade policies to create a conducive environment for the realization of the Africa Free Trade Area, thereby contributing to rapid regional integration;

(c) Diversify the African economies away from primary agriculture and extractive-based activities through the rapid development and promotion of regional strategic commodities value chains driven by vibrant agribusiness;

(d) Develop centres of excellence in Africa to develop and share lessons on innovation, resilience, improving food security, safety nets, and so on.

B. National level

58. The following recommendations were made:

(a) Develop and disseminate new technologies – such as information and communication technologies; geographic information system mapping; integrated pest management technologies; post-harvest technology; early warning systems for drought and flooding, irrigation systems, and other types of water and soil management technologies; and high-yielding new crop varieties – to rural areas and smallholder farmers;

(b) Support poor smallholder farmers to withstand future shocks, natural disasters, market volatility, financial crises, etc., and to boost agricultural productivity so that it contributes to long-term food and nutrition security;

(c) Tackle food and nutrition insecurity in a holistic approach, which involves:

(i) Dealing with water, energy and food stress with a view to managing natural resources sustainably, to secure land and water rights; phasing out inefficient subsidies on water, energy and fertilizers; and creating a macroeconomic environment that promotes efficient use of natural resources;

(ii) Integrating food security into rural and agricultural transformation programmes with the aim of enhancing the resilience of rural residents;

(iii) Developing pro-poor policies that enhance the purchasing power of the poor;

- (iv) Developing national approaches to food and nutrition security that are resilient to shocks and other stresses, while ensuring that external and international actors buy into those approaches and support them;
- (v) Encouraging and facilitating a multisectoral approach to food security and resilience through coordinating plans and programmes across line ministries, and evaluating national sectoral strategies and action plans using food security and resilience-building lenses;
- (vi) Orienting national food security policies towards more domestic food self-reliance (though in a subregional or regional economic community perspective) to take advantage of the strength and comparative advantages of each country or subregion, while building on strong historical and cultural ties, and obvious natural complementarities among countries, with a view to maximizing the synergic and catalytic roles each can play;
- (vii) Involving stakeholders, including the private sector, in the decision-making process.

VI. Conclusion

59. Though many of Africa's countries have experienced significant economic growth in recent years, they have failed to significantly reduce the hunger level to suggest that ensuring food security will remain a significant challenge. Efforts to tackle the chronically high levels of hunger and malnutrition in many parts of Africa have been much slower to get off the ground.

60. Accordingly, all countries in the region are yet to make tangible and consistent efforts to efficiently deal with the structural hurdles facing their national food systems, not only by concentrating on production, but also by paying adequate attention to other equally important segments of the food value chain, such as harvesting, processing, storage, preservation, distribution and marketing or trade, in addition to education, health and nutrition, which are indispensable, critical factors for ensuring enhanced food security.

61. Specific attention should be given as well to foster intraregional agricultural trade with the increasing role and effect of regional food market on shaping future agriculture, and to the revitalization of regional cooperation on land rights and support for producers, specifically small-scale and agricultural investment.

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