

Food Security in Africa: Current Efforts and Challenges

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Abstract

Africa's food systems are at a crossroad. Several challenges and exogenous shocks, including extreme weather events and climate change, recurrent outbreaks of pests and diseases, limited availability and adoption of yield-increasing technologies have exposed fragilities of Africa's food systems, undermining the ability to meet the food demand of a burgeoning population.

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Background to the Study

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have disrupted the supply chain for agricultural inputs, fuel, and food. The state of food security in the continent is worsening, with over 20 percent of the continent's population (roughly 257 million people) undernourished. Africa bears the heaviest burden of malnutrition, while the African Union's Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Biennial Review report (2019-2021) further reveals that Africa is not on track to meet its goal of ending hunger by 2025. In 2022, over 20 million people and at least 10 million children faced severe food shortage in Africa due to crop failure and four consecutive dry seasons.⁴ East Africa alone lost close to 2 million livestock in a year due to recurrent drought and low response capacity.⁵ Moreover, projections by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa point to Africa's annual food imports increasing significantly; by a factor of seven from \$15 billion in current efforts by AGRA and other African-led institutions.

Given these worrying food security trends, Africa's food systems must become more resilient and guarantee access to healthy and affordable diets for all. Tested systemic models have demonstrated that agriculture transformation is possible in input and output market systems, and that it can be scaled across the continent. Besides engaging in immediate recovery efforts, such as our \$11 million investments to tackle the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has supported African countries to build capacities for the design of agricultural sector strategies and evidence-based policy reforms. At a country level, AGRA has made significant strides in helping resource national agriculture programs, working closely with ministries of agriculture to design 11 flagship programs. Some of the early dividends of this work include:

1. Enhanced capacity of African governments to design and implement policies, and hence respond to emergent agricultural and food systems challenges. AGRA recognizes that “business as usual” is no longer sustainable and has therefore developed a program called “sustainable farming” to ensure that farmers concomitantly achieve three major livelihood objectives, namely: Food security, protecting ecosystem services, and resilience to climate and other shocks. It employs context-specific farming system solutions with emphasis on improving water and nutrient efficiency of crops, replenishing over extracted nutrients through application of judicious amounts of fertilizer, and diversifying the farming systems with climate resilient crops and management practices.
2. To improve climate resilience, AGRA invested in the development of African scientists and African research institutions. AGRA has thus far trained more than 500 national research system breeders at PhD and MSc level, to create local capacity of genetic development.
3. Responding to the climate risks, Africa has capacity to breed and release varieties of crop that are climate adaptive; early maturing, and drought tolerant like cassava, maize, rice, groundnuts, cowpeas, high iron beans, and b-carotene rich sweet potato that can be scaled.

4. Recognizing the malfunctional extension system in Africa, the introduction of private-sector led village-based agricultural advisors' engagement has helped to reduce post-harvest losses by about 30 percent in countries such as Mali, Mozambique, and Nigeria.
5. Together with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), AGRA is building the Regional Food Balance Sheet (RFBS) to address the dearth of reliable, timely, and accurate data and guide food and nutrition related decision making in Africa.
6. Together with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission and other partners, AGRA has established the ECOWAS Rice Observatory (ERO) with respective national chapters, where rice-related matters of trade policy, market development, and farmer support will be discussed, and solutions identified.
7. Within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, AGRA has established Chinyanja Triangle Soybean Trade initiative and linked a total of 22,179 smallholder farmers to regional trade markets, supplying over 7,070 million metric tons (MT) of soybeans valued at more than \$4 million unlocking trade financing valued at \$2.5 million which will support aggregators to source soybeans from smallholder farmers at competitive prices.

Conclusion/Critical Next Steps

Beyond this progress, strategic and urgent measures are still needed to enhance the resilience of Africa's food systems and bolster the ability to deliver on food security and nutrition objectives. Some of these actions include:

1. Accelerating the adoption and implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in order to avert food supply disruptions, as experienced during the pandemic.
2. Providing an enabling policy environment for the financial sector to supply more business and financial tools to Agri-SMEs.
3. Supporting the establishment of Strategic Grain Reserves (SGRs) as a buffer against unexpected exogenous shocks. Social Protection Programs are also priorities and should be implemented with clear graduation targets for the beneficiaries.
4. Moving towards sustainable farming: Although Africa owns about 60 percent of the world's potential land for agricultural expansion,⁷ by 2050, about 45 percent of the additional food should come from sustainable intensification (i.e., producing more food and fiber per unit of land and water).
5. African food systems should be diversified, moving from the major global commodities: Rice, wheat, and maize; and more investment must be made towards African indigenous and resilient crops including sorghum, millets, teff, and cassava.
6. Increasing investments in market infrastructure and other incentive mechanisms to support African farmers to adopt climate smart policies, technologies, and practices, including afforestation and rehabilitation of degraded lands, wetlands,

- and protected areas to enhance carbon sequestration and reduce carbon losses.
7. Investment in irrigation infrastructure is critical. Rainfed food production sits at the center of 70 percent of Africa's livelihoods. This heavy reliance on rainfed systems exposes farmers to recurrent drought and other extreme events, hence water-centered adaptation must be a priority for Africa.
 8. Increased availability of clean and renewable energy for rural Africa, the absence of which is currently contributing hugely to deforestation and climate change exposure.
 9. Institutional capacity: Africa's level of exposure and vulnerability is connected to its low institutional capacity and governance systems. We need to ensure that national systems have the capacity to convert climate policies and commitments into action.
 10. Early warning systems and associated climate advisories that are demand-driven and context specific, combined with climate change literacy and awareness, can help make the difference between coping and informed adaptation responses.

Reference

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