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## AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

# Building Resilience in Food Systems and Agricultural Value Chains: Agricultural Policy Responses to COVID-19 in Africa

G-CoP

SPM

## Summary for Policymakers



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# 01 Introduction

**T**he unexpected exogenous shocks inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy have resulted in precipitated varying global, regional, and national policy responses. To contain the spread of the virus and mitigate its widespread impacts, countries have responded by adopting unprecedented policy measures reflecting a mixture of scientific advice and political considerations. The precise mixtures of which appear to reflect deep-seated cultural preferences and tolerance for individuality and perceptions of personal rights versus collective responsibility. Other contextual factors include national capacities, capabilities and reach as well as environmental circumstances. The adopted policy measures are largely two-pronged. The first set of policies – the ‘short term’ – focuses on an immediate response aimed strategies to flatten the infection curve through therapeutic and non-therapeutic prevention and containment measures – notably personal hygiene, social distancing, face masking, border closures. The consequences of which are reflected in lockdown, leading to dramatic reduction in economic activity for some countries to various degrees. The second set of policies takes the form of eased monetary and fiscal adjustments policies as well as social safety nets targeted at helping citizens, businesses and public institutions to cope with reduction in economic exchanges. Additionally, some countries have implemented export restrictions of staples to conserve their own food stocks while others have also taken anticipatory measures like export restriction.

**Due to existing vulnerabilities, Africa is likely to be severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic within various ramifications that include food availability and supply chain food security generally.**

The unprecedented and sudden impacts of COVID-19 on global value chains and food supply systems expose many African countries, especially those that are reliant on food importation to feed their citizens, to greater risks of mortality than those created by just the health risks of COVID-19 infection. Added to this are challenges associated with imports of agricultural inputs as well as the collapse of the international markets for agricultural output such as horticulture markets. Before the onslaught of COVID-19, malnutrition, hunger and starvation were silent pandemics that kill hundreds of thousands of Africans annually. For instance, 237 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are adjudged chronically undernourished, while 257 million Africa people (20 percent of the population) are experiencing hunger. Furthermore, by early 2020, prior to the pandemic 135 million people were experiencing hunger



**With the collapse of national economies and subsequent loss of jobs and income, the social distancing, lockdowns and border closures, the policies designed to flatten the COVID-19 disease curve in Africa, seem primed to kill more people than the virus itself.**

so severe that it threatened their lives and livelihoods<sup>1</sup>. The World Food Program estimates that with COVID-19, this number could be doubled by the end of 2020<sup>2</sup>. It is estimated that about 9 million people die of hunger annually worldwide (mainly children in poorer countries).

Over 70 percent of Africans depend on artisanal jobs in the informal sector where the main source of income for their daily food is physical labour. Lockdowns in the developing countries have literally shut down the only sources of income for the most vulnerable majority in African countries. Under these conditions, curve flattening policies are difficult to implement and police as many artisanal (gig economy) workers are driven to continue working in order to survive. The risk of exploitation under these conditions is evident. Even for those who have the resources to buy food in the developing world, prices have skyrocketed for many commodities in many locations due to scarcities created by border closures, panic buying and individual as well as national hoarding of food supplies. Many times, these actions are taken as a risk-mitigating measures against uncertainties caused by COVID -19. This has resulted in artificial supply shocks which have increased staple food prices beyond the reach of many Africans who live on less than US\$2 a day. Up to 419 million additional people could fall into extreme poverty in 2020, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia<sup>3</sup>.

**The COVID-19 pandemic is a reminder of the age-old value of nations being able to feed themselves.**

Food is an essential universal need for all human beings, a right which when denied, affects all aspects of the human experience and risks the security of nations, economies and communities. It has remained a paradox that Africa – the continent that holds over 60% of the remaining arable land on earth and with more than 60% of the population engaged in Agriculture – spends over US\$135 billion of its scarce foreign exchange earnings to import food to feed its citizens. It seems highly probable that with rising prices and reduced income the knock-on effects of the aforementioned COVID-19 response measures on food systems and agricultural market value chains will be inimical to many Africans.

- 1 World Food Program, 2020. Risk of Hunger Pandemic as COVID-19 set to almost double acute hunger by end of 2020, viewed 1 May 2020. <https://insight.wfp.org/cCOVID-19-will-almost-double-people-in-acute-hunger-by-end-of-2020-59df0c4a8072>
- 2 World Food Program, 2020. Risk of Hunger Pandemic as COVID-19 set to almost double acute hunger by end of 2020, viewed 1 May 2020. <https://insight.wfp.org/cCOVID-19-will-almost-double-people-in-acute-hunger-by-end-of-2020-59df0c4a8072>
- 3 World Bank, 2020. The impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Why sub-Saharan Africa might be the region hardest hit, viewed 01 May 2020. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/impact-covid-19-coronavirus-global-poverty-why-sub-saharan-africa-might-be-region-hardest>

**The state of food hunger exacerbated by the pandemic is likely to lead to hunger pandemics that may induce social unrest in many African countries, if the current lock-downs across countries persist.**

This may create longer term impacts in many countries through loss of lives of citizens, permanent physical, cognitive as well as the emotional damage for children who may survive the hunger pandemic. Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will therefore be protracted beyond its duration. Thus, there might be a vicious circle of the human cost exacerbating the economic cost. A sustained negative food export balance through societal breakdown will exert avoidable additional pressure on already limited fiscal balances for the affected countries. Without some forms of global interventions, the future is bleak for nations, communities, cultures and millions of individuals.

**African countries need support to learn from the mistakes and successes of others regarding the new knowledge products and technical expertise acquired during the pandemic.**

This will assist the continent to make prompt and better decisions in addressing the rapidly evolving pandemic, case management, and at the same time keep in view the need to build whilst creating resilience in the COVID-19 world and beyond through the implementation of effective public policy and governmental intervention, perhaps on a global scale .

**The African Development Institute (ADI) of the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) convened a Global Community of Practice (G-CoP) event on COVID-19 response strategies to support countries with evidence-based policy options, strategies, capacity development, and technical assistance.**

The ADI in collaboration with the World Bank Group, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the African Agricultural Economics Society (AAAS), and selected anchor institutions including Universities, Universities of Agriculture, Agricultural Policy Research Institutions and Networks convened the second G-CoP policy seminar on Building Resilience in Food Systems and Agricultural Value Chains: Agricultural Policy Responses to COVID-19 in Africa. The seminar that was held on 18 -and 19 May 2020, brought together 770 Experts from 57 nationalities. Key Panelists included former Ministers of Finance, former Ministers of National Planning, Former Chief Economic Adviser to a Head of State and Government, technical staff of Prime Minister's Offices, and leading Experts from multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, IFPRI, FAO, UNDP, UNECA, CGAIR, the UN, Oxfam, and World Wildlife Fund. Many leaders of universities, think tanks, professional associations including the African Association of Agricultural Economists (AAAE), and leaders of the private sector were also represented. Delegates discussed policy options, implementation challenges as well as the remedial actions required to build resilience in food systems and agricultural value chains from short-, medium-, and long-term perspectives. The potency, applicability and multiplier effects of each policy measure in Africa's social, economic and political context were also taken into consideration.

**This policy brief summarizes the emergent key policy options from the seminar. It includes:**

- options for short-term policy interventions required to deal with agriculture and food-related impacts of the pandemic,
- medium-term policies needed for economic rebuilding, and
- long-term policies for building more resilient and inclusive economies, and resetting reinforcing the drive towards achieving the SDGs.

The policy brief also presents a high-level summary of the potency and appropriateness of each policy option within the African contexts and suggests remedial actions to address the implementation challenges.

**The overarching goal is to equip African countries with policy options to contain the virus, recover and rebuild better economies with more focus on the quality of growth, rather and less than on the quantity of economic growth.**

The two-day conversation repeatedly highlighted that the focus of recovery should be on building economies that focuses on efficiency, sufficiency, inclusiveness, and above all resilience through sustainability for all African nations. This is the best way to enhance resilience to exogenous shocks such as COVID-19 in the Africa we want.



# 02 Policy Options

The G-CoP experts proffered several pragmatic policy recommendations available to national governments for promoting agriculture and food production and building resilience in the sector. These were structured into short (containment of challenges imposed on agriculture and food production), medium (rebuilding the economies), and long (building resilient economies in post COVID-19 Africa) terms.

## 2.1

### Short-Term Policy Options for Containment

Suitable national policies are required to contain the impact of COVID-19 on agriculture and food production. This requires strong collaboration between the government at national and sub-national levels and all relevant stakeholders, including citizens, as well as local and international development partners. The focus will be to do everything possible to save lives from both the COVID-19 virus as well as the economic disruptions that ensued, particularly of the poor and vulnerable whose lives and livelihoods – agriculture and food production have been impacted by the pandemic. Reducing chronic food poverty is a major focus of the policy options. Indeed, some prevention and containment measures currently being implemented, e.g. lockdowns, without provision of adequate social safety nets are potentially fatal for the poor. Considering local pre-conditions and vulnerabilities in defining and implementing prevention and containment, policies would assist countries to overcome these challenges.

- (i) Provide coordination mechanism to deliver food safety net to the vulnerable at national and sub-national levels.**

While this policy option is most appropriate in all countries and contexts, poor data and legal identity of the vulnerable regarding who they are, where they live, and the type of support they need is a key challenge. In addition, some social groups can be excluded or left out, especially if conditional cash transfer is adopted. In the COVID 19 context where majority is impacted, exclusion is more likely. Many countries also have a weak and sometimes non-existent coordination frameworks for reaching the vulnerable. Several remedial actions are

needed to overcome these challenges. First, governments should build on existing non-governmental channels, mainly faith-based organizations, women associations, community-based organizations, or NGO-run food banks and school feeding programmes to distribute food to the vulnerable. Useful data and information are also available through Banks and telecommunication companies, as well as tried and tested mobile phone-based technologies such as the e-wallet systems, mobile money, even recharge cards. Second, there is a need to design, adopt and implement social safety net policies such as cash transfers, voucher systems, food and essential commodity distribution, food dispensers adopting concept of Automatic teller machines in most vulnerable communities, grants, tax waivers, concessional loans and credit guarantee schemes with a clear targeting and surveillance systems to ensure that the essential needs of youth and women are met. Based on these, evidence-based traditional social safety net-type policies that target vulnerable populations can be developed. Given the existing fiscal constraints, it will be important to re-assess amounts of social safety net support that can practically go to different affected populations. As an immediate response measure, governments should explore the possibility of avoiding conditionalities.

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**(ii) Increase and preserve local food production levels.**

To do this, it is important to be mindful of the fact that there will be coordination and management challenges with the food supply system that is dominated by traditional and informal production, which account for up to 75% of households' food supply in many African countries. Due to their sizes, these smallholder farmers have limited capacity and skills to increase quality and quantity of food production. Added to this are the lockdowns that impose movement restrictions on farmers and farming inputs across countries and regions as well as access to the markets. To get around these challenges, governments will have to leverage existing data and information in possession of agriculture research and development organizations donors and other actors in the sector that are interacting directly with farmers. Agriculture and food production also need to be designated as essential services and prioritized in managing exogenous shocks and sustainable development. The beauty of this action is that it will protect and support the food supply system and all those involved in it (farmers, agricultural workers, agro processors, laboratory services, extension service workers) while ensuring needed farm inputs are delivered before the start of the planting season. It will also allow for prioritization of imports of necessary food to augment local production. Supporting informal agriculture farmer producers and trader organizations such as cooperatives and self-help organizations and making available to farmers inputs as well as other necessary protective equipment to ensure production and easy flow of food supply will help contain the impact of the pandemic on food production.

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**(iii) Allocate sufficient (more) budget to agriculture in line with the Malabo Declaration to develop innovative financing mechanisms for agriculture and food production systems.**

AU member states have already committed to allocate at least 10% of their budget to agriculture. However, the Biennial Review process has reported limited progress in achieving this goal. Limited fiscal space that could lead to deficit budgets, high borrowing costs, and debt distress are key challenges facing implementation of this policy option. The outcome of this is that governments are forced to rely on aid or grants (including debt forgiveness), and concessional financing during a major crisis like this one. Other challenges include weak policy and regulatory environments, the high-risk profile of smallholder farmers and SMEs in Africa, perceived low returns of agriculture and poorly defined property rights and land tenure system. National governments would have to recalibrate annual budget allocations to increase current and capital expenditures for agriculture. This will include targeted innovations to improve seeds, provision of quality inputs, greenhouse projects, extension/advisory services, small dams, irrigation, and private sector involvement in storage and processing. They would also need to break the pro-cyclical practice of overreliance on core sovereign budgets to finance agriculture. This would require involving State and non-State institutions that could improve efficiency through integrated finance, guarantees, standards, and promotion mechanisms. Partnership with formal private sector and donor organizations that have on-the-ground experience in dealing with smallholder farmers and cracking the code on smallholder farmer financing would also be helpful. Innovative financing mechanisms should be developed, especially in partnership with the private sector.

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**(iv) Improve Agricultural Marketing Architecture, including establishment of commodity exchanges for staples.**

Limited experience in commodity exchange market operations and management could be a major limiting factor here. A remedial action would be to undertake cross-learning from other African and non-African countries that have successfully established and managed commodity exchanges. Some African countries that could offer good lessons include Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zambia. Instituting information exchange platforms that are linked to improvements in electronic data, money transfer and similar technology-driven initiatives could provide the needed initial takeoff impetus.

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**(v) Refocus trade policies on regional trade to promote intra-regional food trade. Implementation of this policy option could face three key challenges.**

First, African countries face high tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade. These include, tariffs, restrictive quotas, outright export and import bans, varying food safety standards as well as sanitary and phytosanitary regulations. Second, countries face several supply-side constraints that include weak policy frameworks and low agricultural productivity. Lastly, there is limited investment and insurance cover. A major action for dealing with these challenges is the roll out implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as a matter of urgency and focusing its work on implementing its relevant protocols for removing tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade.

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**(vi) Sign long-term contract with local producers, urban farmers and suppliers to safeguard supply variability in the short to medium term.**

Physical and social distancing as well as movement restrictions could disrupt food production and ability of farmers and producers to meet agreed supply obligations. Furthermore, high risks to production emanating from shocks that include climate change, pest attack, etc., are also obvious. Relatedly, smallholder agriculture in Africa is characterized by scattered, unregistered and informal production units. One immediate action that is required is to classify agricultural and food production as essential services, thus allowing farmers and food production-related materials to move unencumbered. These essential workers need to be digitally empowered as well so that they can do as much transacting as possible remotely to allow flow of goods and effective rapid linkages to processing centers. Additional action would include integrating the smallholder producers into the formal trading systems in addition to providing insurance for farmers to hedge against real and potential risks.

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**(vii) Establish National Agricultural Productivity Accelerator (NAPA) to support SMEs to increase production.**

Several factors dampen agricultural productivity. Some of these are dependence on rain-fed agriculture, low soil organic carbon levels, low use of irrigation potentials, gender disparities, policy bias against youth and women, weak institutional support, limited investment, and weak private sector participation. Also problematic are under-capitalization and under-investment in processing facilities and mechanization, inadequate storage or cold chain infrastructure, poor extension services and access to affordable value chain and trade finance. There is also the low use of fertilizers. To deal with these issues, national governments would need to provide holistic approaches to agricultural productivity that cuts across health, gender, age, water resources, transportation, education, etc. Creating a special initiative like Singapore's "30by30" to increase food self-sufficiency from 10% to 30% by 2030 would also be a credible action to take. Additional action would be to set up private equity and diaspora remittances securitisation platforms to aggregate funding for agricultural production, food systems and value chain development in Africa with the African Development Bank acting as manager of such fund.

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**(viii) Develop 'tailor-cut and sewn' policies that incentivize women and youth to uptake agriculture and food production as business through targeted policies.**

Weak institutional framework for proper identification and targeting of women and youth could impede implementation of this policy action. A remedial action would require providing "affirmative" rural finance for youth and women entrepreneurs as well as enhancing access to agricultural inputs digital support platforms for youth and women farmers through cooperatives and other informal self-help organizations. Deliberate efforts must be made to engage youth from the beginning of programme/policy design, and throughout the process, looking at different categories of youth and their particular needs. Actions should aim to help young people acquire digital skills since most of the youth are interested in ICT. It is important to be more proactive in facilitating match-making opportunities for youth and women and ensure creation of more decent jobs for them. Agriculture is becoming knowledge-intensive, which is very appealing to technologically savvy youth. Agriculture productivity and market intelligence need

to be made available to farmers from cell phone access in ways that consider low bandwidth access in remote areas. Digital connectivity is helping farmers increase their incomes by 30% from better decision-making related to planting guided by better weather information, input optimization guided by remote sensing and direct access to market data to avoid post-harvest losses and connect to processors.

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**(ix) Eliminate post-harvest losses by investing in farm infrastructure such as roads and supply logistics.**

Grossly limited public funding for agriculture and rural infrastructure development and food production could impinge implementation of this policy option. As a way out, national governments need to encourage farmers and consumers to invest in cheap food processing technology that can help prolong the shelf life of perishable food items. This may require supporting and perhaps subsidizing investment in storage facilities, especially for perishables, as well as creating an enabling environment for private sector/agribusiness investment. Using food-for-work and other safety net schemes, mixed with employment to undertake infrastructure upgrading and maintenance would provide cheaper and faster means of developing agriculture and food production infrastructure. Efforts here should be linked to ensuring better synergy between national and regional implementation plans supporting value chains and regional trade infrastructure and other continental programmes such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). Also important is commencement of initiatives such as the Common African Agro-Parks (CAAP) programme to support the development of agro-parks and special economic zones in key trade corridors to improve connectivity and efficiency in terms of access to more affordable electricity, water and modern storage, logistics, transport and ICT facilities for the production and processing of agricultural raw materials on a commercial scale.

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**(x) Fund innovation and technology in packaging, preserving and delivering perishable food.**

Incidentally, most African countries exhibit weak local technology base that could provide the background for inventing appropriate technology to deliver this type of innovation. Exploring existing silent local technology-related revolutions being pioneered by youth startups across Africa should be the starting point. Making sure these innovations can operate based on FAIR principles for open use is also critical. FAIR data are findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable. This can allow governments to collect data in ethical ways that can help decision making to support local entrepreneurs and farmers. There are also several producer organizations and informal groups across the continent that may be supported to deliver on the needed technology innovation. As a way of incentivizing technology exploration and adoption, governments should consider launching an open competitive National Food Technology Fund. Young people and their skills are solid foundation to build on. There is also an important role that the private sector can play. Public-private platform should be leveraged to harness the ongoing innovative technologies in food production technology in Africa.



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**(xi) Relocate the food markets to more accessible locations.**

This policy action could lead to a temporary disruption in the food supply chains at the local level. At the minimum, governments should avoid abrupt and complete closure of markets that are an important source of livelihood for many poor households. Rather, the focus should be on decongesting the market and instituting appropriate safeguards and safety measures to prevent and contain the spread of the virus. This could be achieved through the creation of temporary smaller satellite wholesale markets with controlled entry and exit. Focus could also be on online food markets. Lessons on how Alibaba used the SARS epidemic to accelerate digital transformation in China, especially using online marketplaces is helpful.

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**(xii) Provide targeted fiscal support for smallholder food producers and importers to ensure free flow of food.**

To overcome limited availability of public finance to provide direct funding support to farmers, one action point would be to implement targeted subsidy programs for smallholders who really need the support. Reduced tariffs on agricultural commodities and food imports until the situation improves would also help the situation. Reducing tariffs on agricultural inputs would improve access to agricultural inputs while reducing food tariffs would be beneficial to consumers by addressing low food supplies, rising food prices and general food security. Such fiscal support would take the forms of tax exemptions, deferred tax payments, access to credit as well as facilitation of interest-exempt loans and granting of temporary cash payments or subsidies to poor farmers. Targeted support to scale up the blue economy, including urban fisheries and streamlined governance of fish stock, blockchain support of sustainable practices and fishing licences in African waters would be smart actions to take.

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**(xiii) Ensure effective monitoring of food prices to ensure vulnerable people are not unduly exploited.**

Food hoarding and panic buying have resulted in high food inflation that have severely jeopardized the poor and vulnerable. First, governments, through their relevant organs, should ensure effective collection and tracking of food production and farm gate price movements to prevent hoarding and exploitation. Second, structured, effective, transparent, and timely communication that encourages people to avoid panic-buying and food hoarding would help manage people's attitude. The communication should incorporate information regarding the status of food availability and action government is taking to ensure adequate supply of food to meet local and community needs. Lastly, borders should be kept open for food imports to ensure free flow of food and allow food markets and food supply chains to work.

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**(xiv) Create public-private partnership in agriculture and food production.**

The challenge, though, is that private sector inclusion efforts are susceptible to be interrupted by government bureaucracy and ad hoc policies. To ensure successful implementation of this policy option, several remedial actions are required. First, government policies would have to be aligned with private sector development policies that aim at harnessing investment potentials in the sector and prioritizing their implementation. Second, governments should involve and engage, at very early planning stage, the private sector in

shaping public policies that would impact on their activities. Emerging processes are needed to let market principles drive implementation with policy being a support system to back healthy systems that ensure inclusion of the most vulnerable in growth opportunities. Third, governments should provide, on transparent terms, space for private sector to supply inputs on credit and recover the costs through delivery of output at harvest. Fourth, encourage private sector-driven financial inclusion instruments such as contract farming to help smallholder farmers whose capital bases are eroded by the pandemic. Fifth, governments need to minimize the cost of regulations and increase their transparency and predictability to allow private sector to plan and execute their business plans over time. Lastly, work with industry to chart an agenda for promoting action research to support agro-industrialisation in the medium term, ensure policy relevance and support prioritization of skills-matching.

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**(xv) Resist call for protectionist and restrictive trade policies on staple foods.**

Acting contrary would increase chances of retaliation by neighbouring countries, possibly triggering the 'beggar-thy-neighbour' policy action. Additionally, if simultaneously adopted by many countries, export restrictions can lead to lower global supply and higher international prices, which will be particularly damaging to poor import-dependent countries within the continent. In the medium to long run, if local production is too high, this will result in lower producer prices and an uncertain policy environment, creating disincentives for producers to invest in the next production cycle. To deal with these challenges, governments should institute a well-managed open border policy and reorientation of Customs clearance procedures for food. This requires clarity and coherence on classification of food as essential goods in cross-border trade.

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**(xvi) Provide immediate social protection support to the most vulnerable with emphasis on food.**

The challenge here is proper identification of the vulnerable that require safety nets support as well as strategy for reaching them. These are mainly poor people living in slums and women caregivers who are usually the most vulnerable when food shocks occur. Added to this is the limited fiscal space for governments to maneuver. A starting point is to leverage the vast branch networks of financial institutions, post offices, community health care centers and faith-based organizations to generate requisite data and information about the poor and vulnerable. Focus could also be on encouraging the building of financial instruments and social networks (like cooperatives) that could provide safety nets to enhance food sector-specific capacity for resilience. Several existing humanitarian funding that target poor and vulnerable people should also be explored. Efforts made in Senegal by the tech savvy group #ForceCovid19SN to create a platform to ensure immediate availability and equitable access to food for the most acute food-insecure populations should be explored.

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**(xvii) Proactive policy dialogue by the Ministries of Agriculture.**

Limited capacity and efficiency of Ministries of Agriculture to engage in effective policy dialogue is a major shortfall to implementing this policy option. This is worsened by the fact that policy dialogue is a greenfield area for the Ministries, thus lacking the requisite experience to engage in this activity. Governments need to tap into multilateral and bilateral development institutions' regional and country-specific capacity building and policy dialogue initiatives and capacity to convene dialogue spaces. For example, the African Development Bank through the African Development Institute provides several tailored capacity building and policy dialogue support initiatives for RMCs that, if leveraged, would provide the needed support.

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**(xviii) Improve credibility of Ministries of Agriculture by re-evaluating their approach to managing agriculture, agribusiness and food production.**

One major observation is that most Ministries of Agriculture have focused more on making agriculture a development-oriented activity rather than profitable business. An immediate action is for governments to designate agriculture a business and initiate national policy to support it. This would include administrative and regulatory actions that deal with land ownership and registration issues with a view to clearing the existing lack of clarity. National policy coordination, cohesion and consistency also need to be enhanced to instill confidence in existing and potential of individuals and firms that are interested in undertaking private sector investment in agriculture and food production. Metrics to support sustainable production and profitability need also to be harnessed. The TEEBAgriFood initiative to evaluate negative and positive externalities related to social, human and natural capital could help make this transformation data-driven.

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**(xix) Incentivize youth to engage in agriculture.**

A major challenge to overcome to make this happen is the perception that farming is an outdated profession and has low status. This mindset is especially common among educated youth who feel farming is neither prestigious nor intellectually challenging, albeit gradual changes are taking place. Worsening the situation is the low return on agriculture in comparison to effort, making youth to feel that farming is not financially rewarding and intellectually satisfying because it does not involve creativity. Several remedial actions are needed to correct this long-entrenched mindset. First, invest in basic rural infrastructure to make life in rural areas where farming activities take place comparable to the cities, thus encouraging youth to relocate there. Second, increase exposure, at early age and at all levels of education, to agriculture and food production knowledge and information to build knowledge intensive digitally-driven economies. Third, improve land governance structure through tackling land tenure and productivity issues as well as registration and titling through digitization of land registries. Fourth, improve access to mentoring and financial services through entrepreneurship development funds, crowd funding, special loans and socioeconomic empowerment supports. Embark on intensive use of social media to improve agriculture's image. Lastly, encourage greater use of Information and Communication Technologies in agriculture to make it appealing to youth. This

requires the promotion of technology-based modern agriculture which reduces drudgery and increases profit through smart private-public sector partnerships. Development partners should work with governments in order to involve more young Africans in the use of drones in agriculture for example. Example of institutions include Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA), Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and other relevant foundations. Youth should be helped to see the links between the fourth industrial revolution and profitable sustainable business possibilities to feed a growing continental population that will more than double by 2050. It is important for youth to become the entrepreneurs to benefit from the current 135 billion USD in food imports and turn this into drivers of local sustainable growth.

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**(xx) Develop agricultural e-commerce and delivery service system to match supply with demand at multiple levels.**

This would ensure that basic food needs are met while maintaining social distancing. Poor state of technology with weak internet penetration and services could limit focused implementation. A starting point would be to leverage innovative solutions by youth in the ICT sector that are found in almost all African countries as well as partnership with social scientists through hackathon to create multidisciplinary approaches that enhance not only money flows but also social, human and natural capital gains and longer-term sustainable solutions grounded in adequate understanding of local context.

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**(xxi) Enhance monitoring, not only of incidence of the virus, but also availability of food market information systems (MIS).**

Information received would be useful in restructuring market information systems to ensure effective monitoring of price trends at the farm gate as well as nutrition-related food security issues. However, there is limited knowledge on the evolution of the virus. Moreover, market information systems are weak or not functioning effectively in some African countries. To deal with this potential clog, market information systems have to be capacitated and revamped through leveraging existing MIS mechanisms and structures and draw on the experience of development partners such as FAO. Furthermore, the capacity of Ministries of Agriculture and research institutions need to be enhanced by equipping them with functional MIS systems to enable them to collect relevant information in higher frequencies in ways that align with FAIR principles.

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**(xxii) Ensure safety and health of agricultural workers.**

Safe and healthy working conditions are the only way to guarantee continuous and consistent food production by all workers in the agri-food sector, whether temporary, seasonal or migrant workers, irrespective of their legal status or gender. However, exposure of farmers, workers and food processors to risk of infection is a major concern. Government intervention requires providing farmers and food processors with all necessary personal protective equipment and ensure that policies exist that protect agricultural workers from exploitation and that their living conditions are improved.

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**(xxiii) Save the “bones” (wholesale and retail markets) and “arteries” (SMEs in logistics and wholesale) of the food supply chain.**

Challenges faced here include weak logistics infrastructure base, inefficient inventory management, and inaccurate demand forecasting. To deal with them, governments need to focus on assuring and upgrading the logistics infrastructure and the operations of the SMEs in the food supply chain with public investments and data driven regulatory/policy action.

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**(xxiv) Prioritize food systems and agricultural value chains as a national security emergency.**

But lockdowns and border closures disrupt flow of food supply in the value chain, worsened by non-exclusivity and informal nature of most intra-regional food supply chains. Governments need to establish green corridors and keep the domestic food systems and interregional food supply chains open during the pandemic.



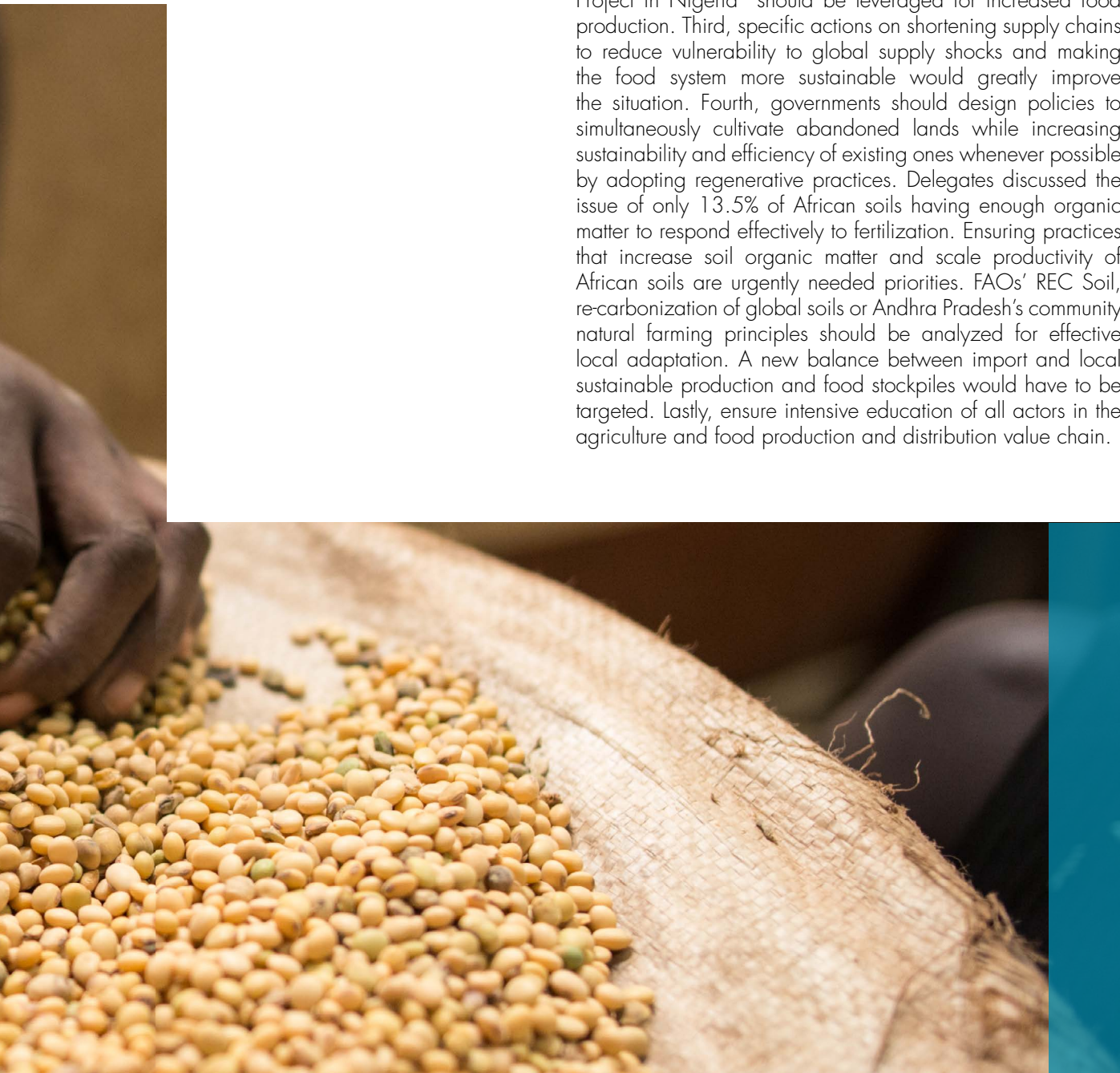
## 2.2

### Medium-Term Policy Options for Economic Rebuilding

**(i) Improve local food production and distribution.**

The focus of the delegates on this recovery phase is on rebuilding the economies better, more sustainably and beginning to lay the foundation for building resilience. For this phase, the following policy options were emphasized:

Social distancing and lockdowns, especially at the beginning of the planting season limit agricultural activities that would make it challenging to ramp up food production. Long and bureaucratic processes involved in establishing structures augmenting food production is also a credible challenge to overcome. To remedy these challenges, governments need to designate agriculture and food production as essential services to allow easy passage of farmers and inputs required for food production. Second, existing agriculture and food production structures like the National Fadama Development Project in Nigeria should be leveraged for increased food production. Third, specific actions on shortening supply chains to reduce vulnerability to global supply shocks and making the food system more sustainable would greatly improve the situation. Fourth, governments should design policies to simultaneously cultivate abandoned lands while increasing sustainability and efficiency of existing ones whenever possible by adopting regenerative practices. Delegates discussed the issue of only 13.5% of African soils having enough organic matter to respond effectively to fertilization. Ensuring practices that increase soil organic matter and scale productivity of African soils are urgently needed priorities. FAOs' REC Soil, re-carbonization of global soils or Andhra Pradesh's community natural farming principles should be analyzed for effective local adaptation. A new balance between import and local sustainable production and food stockpiles would have to be targeted. Lastly, ensure intensive education of all actors in the agriculture and food production and distribution value chain.



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**(ii) Invest in new farming technology.**

Weak technological base to produce sophisticated equipment such as drones and poor financial resource availability to fund and support technical innovation, especially for individual and corporate technological startups are key issues to grapple with. Partnering with the organized private sector to set up Innovation Funds to support technological startups providing a networking and mentoring platform between local technology startups and bigger technology firms across Africa and globally would empower local firms to provide the needed technology base to implement this policy option. Another issue that must also be taken into account is the enabling legal and institutional environment for greater private sector engagement.

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**(iii) Build productive farmer business models.**

General belief that agriculture is not a business but a subsistent activity or development programme, lack of organization along the food value chains, and limited data and information on actors in the value chain are issues requiring attention. One action point is to conduct a diagnostic mapping aimed at identifying buyers that are willing and able to actively engage as business partners for smallholder farmers and suppliers with a view to mentoring them and improving their earnings. Another action point is to partner with existing private sector entrepreneurship development organizations that are experienced in running entrepreneurship programs, especially for youth. Action needs to be directed at linking agro-based infant and cottage industries to local markets in the urban and rural areas. Establish linkages to markets by supporting the development and strengthening of the capacity of actors involved in the local markets, providing timely information on market prices and quantities and promoting structured supply integration, expanding access to distribution networks, joint marketing, etc. Also consider establishing collection centers closer to producers by developing storage facilities like warehouse receipt system platforms where farmers can deliver their produce without the need to go to markets. In all of these, new models that build on existing foundations should be explored.

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**(iv) Invest in agriculture and food production infrastructure, Research and Development systems (R&D) and smart technology development and deployment.**

Good roads are essential to get farming inputs to rural areas, and grains crops to the market. The existing highly deplorable state of physical agricultural infrastructure that includes poor transportation, unstable electricity supply, lack of storage facilities, and weak irrigation system. There is also inability of public finance to fill the required large infrastructure gap. To ensure successful implementation of this policy option, governments need to develop integrated land and water resources management, strengthen the use of technological and digital tools, and establish 'Innovation Labs' to experiment production of affordable food. Exploring methodologies like Zero Budget Natural Farming also needs to be considered, especially when cost of infrastructure to reduce the high cost of inputs. All of these will focus on optimizing use of inputs, increase productivity/yields, improve crop forecasts, prevent plant diseases at an early stage, and facilitate access to insurance and finance, and, at the same time, sustain the use of scarce natural resources.

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**(v) Develop National Agricultural Innovation Parks.**

However, most countries have limited experience in setting up, operating and managing such parks. There are also existential bottlenecks that include lower logistics performance (cost, time and reliability), uncoordinated strategies for industrial development, and a misconception of the comparative advantages of countries. Countries will need to identify success stories within and outside Africa on establishing, operating and managing Agro-industrial Parks and adapt lessons for local use. Developing national legal and regulatory frameworks to govern operations of the Parks as well as subsidizing and promoting agro-industrial production are important interventions that would make for success. In this regard, South-South sharing of experiences, especially with Asian countries, will do much to expedite the impact of such parks. African governments should facilitate establishment of regional centres of excellence for technology development, innovation, adaptation and diffusion, e.g. food technology, marketing, packaging, branding (local brands, “Buy in Africa”, “Made in Africa”), codes of conduct for exporters, patents, etc.

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**(vi) Reorient policies towards improved self-sufficiency farming at national and regional levels to promote food import substitution.**

This will aim to exploit agroecological conditions and comparative advantage at national and regional levels. The prevailing weak production base could lead to delays in meeting immediate needs, thus creating scarcity of basic food items in most African countries. The land tenure systems that limits access to land for agriculture and food production could also be a limiting factor, especially for women or long-term farming. To remedy these challenges, make land acquisition and registration transparent and easier for agricultural value chains that have a strong business case for food production. Use GPS-based land mapping to help electronic filing of land registration. Make better and more effective use of Satellite data to guide self-sufficient farming through accelerated land registration, use of drone to monitor crop cover, and evaluation of agro-ecological zone fertility based on current land use practices. This would be helpful in comparing over time the trend in land degradation or reclamation. Establish center of excellence for smallholder farm management and set up Food Masterplans at all levels of governance with focus on reducing food loss. One more required action is to set up national-level coordination mechanism. This would aim at facilitating cross-provincial or cross-State movements of agricultural and food products as well as key agricultural inputs within and across countries. Thus, if a part of the country experiences food shortages, food could arrive quickly through waterway, highway, highspeed high speed rail and airways.

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**(vii) Institutionalize reform of agriculture-related activities and food production.**

Entrenched bureaucratic processes and procedures of the Ministries of Agriculture with less emphasis on performance and efficiency of support to farmers and rural livelihoods are real bottlenecks. Lack of coordination among public institutions involved in agricultural activities and food production is a major pain point. To tackle these challenges, governments are enjoined recommended to establish a “One Health Ministry” or “One Health Task Force” hosted at the highest political level, say Presidency, to oversee the related sectors as Parastatals such as Food and Agro-allied Industrialization Agency (FAIA), Public Health and Safety Agency (PHSA), and Environmental Health Agency (EHA). Existing structures need to be totally overhauled with a view to creating new



ones that aim to change the mindset of civil servants and all actors engaged in the agriculture and food production value chain. This process needs to also prioritize data flow for better evidence-based decision making. The proposed reforms need to focus on achieving more efficient, farmer oriented and performance based institutional structures. Rather than go a fell swoop, “incremental” or “gradual” approach to the proposed reform, and transformational changes should be adopted to avoid serious food supply disruptions. A new set of leadership at all levels in the Ministry of Agriculture and other related institutions that are capable of developing and nurturing the new vision for the role of the public sector should be developed and sustained.

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**(viii) Deploy fiscal incentives to encourage farmers, especially smallholder farmers to modernize and become enterprise farmers.**

Implementing this policy option could be checked by high debt levels, commodity price effects on export revenue and trade balance that constrains fiscal space to deploy the needed incentives. To overcome these challenges, built-in fiscal and financial structure in the national economic management space that involves specialized agencies or institutions such as Small Business Administration (SBA) bureaus should be instituted. In addition, undertake budget reprioritization with reallocation of idle and freed resources (e.g. travel) as a result of the pandemic to sectors of need (e.g. agriculture and smallholder farmers’ support).

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**(ix) Improve farm-to-market technology.**

But weak technology base that limits technological innovation in agriculture and food systems. This could frustrate implementation of this policy. To deal with this challenge, governments in partnership with private sector need to create e-markets and similar platforms where people can trade their goods online and not just in a physical market. The government should allow the private sector to drive the process while it focuses on ensuring that the enabling environment is in place. They also need to leverage existing mature platforms as well as youth-driven innovations in e-commerce operations.

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**(x) Develop practical human capacity required to revamp agriculture and agribusiness and not just agriculture science.**

One key characteristic of agriculture education in most African countries that may dampen implementation of this policy is the high level of reliance on an age-long system of agriculture and food production that is more theoretical than practical. In addition, there is the weak link between academic research and industry where knowledge of science lacks practical application in relation to the needs of the industry. To manage this challenge, governments need to improve and retool capacity of professors and researchers to be up to date on local and global food systems developments. This would require linking them with universities, think tanks, private sector based initiatives and research institutions that are reputed for the delivery of practical and relevant agriculture and agribusiness programs.

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**(xi) Deliberately facilitate private sector development and engagement in agriculture and food production in most African countries; avoid public sector domination.**

The challenge, however, is absence of a strong framework for private sector development and engagement. Thus, public sector dominance is obvious in the national economic space, especially in agriculture and food production. To reverse the trend, develop a private sector development strategy that includes framework for public-private partnerships in agriculture and food production. This will include incentivizing private sector participation by setting up risk-sharing financing institutions in

key high-risk sectors, particularly for the transformation of the agriculture sector from a high labor low return space to a knowledge-driven job creation environment. The private sector should be engaged and actively involved at the early stage in the planning process through government establishing a discussion, engagement and coordination platform.

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**(xii) Reconsider the quality of food consumed by the people to ensure improvement in their health to build resilience to health shocks.**

Yet, there is widespread consumption of less nutritious and healthy food by a majority of the population due to non-availability of quality food or due to high cost or non-affordability considerations. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on job losses and reduction in income in most African countries has led to a shift away from nutritious foods to staple foods. The lockdowns also affected physical access to fresh produce markets. Policies to reduce the high cost of nutritious food should aim at both the production and handling/marketing points of view. Traditional food crops that are climate resilient and nutritious have been neglected and replaced by resource intensive monocultures of very few crops (sugarcane, rice, wheat, potato). Governments need to come to the rescue by strengthening and stepping up regenerative practices that favor perennial crops that ensure long term carbon sequestration, better ground cover, climate resilience. Biotechnology innovations regarding production and distribution of bio-fortified food should also be considered when there are no regenerative practices available that can compensate for producing healthy and nutritious foods. Also, policies need to be developed to encourage production of nutritious foods that are indigenous to Africa. This will help avoid westernization of African diets and associated health challenges.

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**(xiii) Improve Customs governance for free transportation and flow of food.**

Road harassment in Africa tends to hinder the planned achievement of food security, especially through food imports and cross-country food movements. There are also sometimes arbitrary applications of taxation which is added to the prices of raw materials or transported goods. Sometimes the issues with Customs is not the tariffs they levy but the excessive controls that results in considerable delays that lead to deterioration of the quality of food, mainly perishable ones. One key action Governments need to take is to modernize and simplify Customs procedures, including computerized processes of Customs documentation to bring in greater transparency in related transactions, and “single-window” processing. There are interesting initiatives such as smart trade facilitation policies (for example, single windows, one-stop border posts, pre-arrival clearance, customs risk management, cargo tracking systems and recognition of licensing and insurance systems) that address non-tariff barriers in support of regional agricultural value chains and economic integration. These should be explored and adapted appropriately.



## 2.3

### Long-Term Policy Options for Building Resilient and Inclusive Economies

The focus of the G-CoP experts in the long term at the seminar was on building resilient economies that are not just able to withstand the negative impacts of the COVID-19 but also able to endure future similar exogenous shocks, no matter what the forms they might take. Some of the key recommendations proffered are highlighted below:

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**(i) Deepen agriculture diversification with less talk but more focused action.**

The aim of this policy approach is to integrate agriculture into the dynamic commercial sector by elevating traditional agricultural production to a high-quality level of production. The expected improved income would stimulate production. But it is well known that weak agro-industrial technology base occasioned by the dearth of basic infrastructure, particularly electricity, limits the extent to which this policy could have a lasting positive impact. To deal with this, countries are to develop integrated agricultural and food production systems that are supported by improved technology, high quality consumer demand, targeted public and trade policies, reliable provision of irrigation and inputs, efficient transportation, etc. In addition, incentivize overseas agri-food production companies to locate and undertake value-addition processing locally. This should be balanced with support for local entrepreneurs to engage in these activities. Investment in renewable energy policies and interventions would also mitigate the infrastructure-related challenges.

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**(ii) Digitize value chain.**

The key benefit of this policy action is to reduce transaction costs associated with buying and selling agricultural produce and food. The implementation challenge here is limited development and upscale of e-technology platforms developed in Africa due to trade and non-trade barriers. Added to this are other challenges that include absence of appropriate infrastructure, intellectual property ownership, governance of the systems, and data sharing between food businesses and governments. Investment in technology adoption and innovation incubation would help a long way in managing the identified challenge. As a first step, it is necessary to assess the challenges and opportunities associated with digitization of food systems. Governments could lay the background by digitizing their economies bit-by-bit with e-government, e-trade, e-services, e-payments, e-training, etc. This would allow them to gradually move towards digitally-driven value chain engagements. This needs to be done in an integrated way to ensure the system drives data flow. Private sector needs to be incentivized.

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**(iii) Improve agricultural practices and food safety standards**

Complexity of laws, regulations and requirements for food safety in the food production, processing and handling value chain are key issues governments would have to grapple with. However, existing weaknesses in implementation can be overcome by reviewing existing rules, regulations and laws governing food value chains with a view to developing modern, effective national food laws and regulations. A complementary action would be to adopt and adapt international best practices in food safety management that include Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and good hygiene practices (GHP). This action does not address the weak capacity of States and non-State Actors in technical areas of food safety standards, as well as in risk assessment, management, and risk communication to support the development of food standards. In fact, there is need on capacity building as well as assessing, in structured, transparent and measurable ways, the performance of food control systems throughout the entire food chain, identifying priority areas for capacity development, and measuring and evaluating progress over time. A tool developed by FAO is the FAO/WHO food control system assessment tool could be considered.

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**(iv) Human capital development, especially in the specialized agricultural universities and learning institutions at local and regional levels.**

Areas of focus will include crop production, regenerative agriculture, agroforestry, animal production, agribusiness, agricultural innovation, aquaculture, etc. Weak human, institutional and networking capacities of African agricultural institutions and universities are major concerns. Countries need to leverage existing training programs that include the African Economic Research Consortium's Collaborative Master of Science in Agricultural and Applied Economics (CMAAE). This training programme focuses on building capacity to conduct policy research in agricultural and applied economics to address food security, agricultural productivity and environmental management. In addition, countries are to develop and deploy specialized intensive and targeted education and training programs to develop local capacities in specific areas of immediate need. The Armenian model for specialized short-term programs in agriculture could be considered.

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**(v) Public-private partnerships for agro-allied industrialization.**

Limited understanding and experience inhibit the process of establishing, managing and operationalizing PPP initiatives. Three main remedial actions would help. First, leveraging experiences of countries as well as bilateral and multilateral organizations that are versed in PPP can help to define a clear regulatory, institutional and engagement PPP governance structure. Second, prioritize establishing common objectives by defining mutual benefits, and identifying complementarity of human and financial resources as initial conditions for forging PPPs. Lastly, provide a foundation for PPP by creating an Agricultural Productivity Fund, with co-funding between Government and private equity venture capitalists to stimulate new technology-enabled, high productivity agri-food enterprises. This venture requires clear private sector management for performance-based evaluation with reliance on quality of deals and not quantity. Effective PPPs also require clear definition of roles and responsibilities upfront in line with funding disbursement so there are no grey zones about timing and source of payments at all stages of partnership.

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**(vi) Re-introduce and revamp Farmer Cooperatives, Marketing Boards and Commodity Exchanges and structure them as PPPs.**

The challenge is the unpleasant memories about the historical mode of operation of some of these organizations, especially the Marketing Boards, that promoted monopoly and exploited consumers as well as primary producers. Countries are recommended to address the inherent monopoly of these organizations where they exist and restructure them in a way that strips them of es monopolistic tendencies and power or ensures highly ethical equitable care relating to social, human and natural capital with clear metrics to measure non-financial returns.

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**(vii) Commercialize agriculture and make it more profitable.**

For this policy option to be viable, the widespread perception that agriculture is a subsistent occupation for old people living in rural villages has to be corrected. One way to do this is to invest more in new methods of food production, harvesting, post-harvest handling and consumption, aiming at increasing sustainability, efficiency and resilience of food systems, and ultimately, making farming a profitable enterprise. Setting up a National Centers of Excellence for Smallholder Farm Management to speed up the transformation from subsistence to enterprise farming would also be helpful. This needs to take into account ways of increasing agriculture productivity while decelerating the 24% greenhouse gas emissions that agriculture currently is responsible for globally. Adoption of sustainable practices needs to be central to these new centers.

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**(viii) Increase investments in R&D significantly to innovate urban farming, future food production & food science & technology.**

What is required is to develop techniques and technologies that would shorten food supply chains. It would also target increased capacity to grow food within cities (urban agriculture and aquaculture). Overall, shortening the food supply chain systems would promote food security. However, lack of proper prioritization of agriculture and food production could hinder successful implementation. Prioritization of agricultural research and development, particularly in hybrid or other improved seed sectors that include rice, corn and wheat would be a potent action to take or for more sustainable long-term production systems, perennial grains need also to be prioritized so farmers can invest on quality seeds that give them returns over years while contributing to long term carbon sequestration. The prioritization will be demonstrated through provision of adequate fiscal space and incentives for the private sector to invest in training, R&D, and modern farming technology. AERC's training programmes highlighted earlier could also be leveraged. Furthermore, Clinical Nutrition Research Centres should be created to strengthen water-agriculture-food-nutrition-health linkages and be grounded in traditional African foods diet that are better for local populations from a nutro-genomics perspective.

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**(ix) Ensure strong political commitment to food security and food systems development.**

This will require cascading responsibility from the central government to the sub-national government levels and tasking government officials to ensure adequate food supplies within their jurisdictions. Weak commitment by government officials and lack of accountability and consequence management could limit extent of impact of this policy option when implemented. As a way out, governments should make performance of local officials in safeguarding food supplies and safety at local levels one of their main key performance indicators. Added to this will be the use of a good blend of management by objectives approach with insistence on consequence management will provide incentives to get government officials to commit to agreed shared goals and to play their role, with insistence on consequence management.

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**(x) Implement AU Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security and allocate at least 10 percent of national budget to agriculture development.**

Limited fiscal space in the face of pressing and competing fiscal needs in all sectors that include large infrastructure gaps and security expenditures remain a major hurdle for implementation of this policy choice. The first step to deal with this challenge is improve public financial management (PFM)<sup>4</sup> to free huge resources from unproductive and less impactful sectors such as fossil fuel subsidy and deploy these to food production. In addition, rather than focusing exclusively on fiscal spending to develop agriculture and food production, a blend of private sector and donor funding should be explored to augment public investment in agriculture and food security.

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**(xi) Establish early warning systems to minimise the effects of future disasters.**

It is noteworthy, however, that poor data systems and weak institutional capacities for intelligence gathering and coordination are major features of many African countries, limiting their ability to establish and manage effective early warning systems. To mitigate these challenges, FAO experience in MIS can be leveraged. Early warning is at the core of FAO Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS). GIEWS continuously monitors food supply and demand and other key indicators for assessing the overall food security situation in all countries of the world. It issues regular analytical and objective reports on prevailing conditions and provides early warnings of impending food crises at country or regional level. In addition, countries are to leverage the AfDB's support interventions in country-level statistics as well as other data collecting institutions through the Africa Information Highway and other initiatives to strengthen national statistics bureaus. This would help in building strong national institutions and governance structures as well as addressing the interaction between them. Governments need to be ready to invest in improved data and analytical skills to support early warnings of impending shocks of any nature and different degrees. Linkages could also be made to early warning systems in other world regions.

4 AfDB is setting up a Public Financial Management Academy that aims to build capacity of regional member countries on all aspects of PFM with emphasis on debt sustainability, macroeconomic modelling and DRM. This will help countries to manage their economies better and thus result in improved allocation of the budget to agriculture and other critical sectors to meet some of these regional commitments

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**(xii) Establish food banks or similar systems.**

This will allow food to be provided directly to the vulnerable through food vouchers and cash transfers. But because food banking is a relatively new phenomenon in most African countries, there are no institutional structures for its effective functioning. Furthermore, there has been limited attention to the development of food banks as a policy option for distribution and redistribution of unused, surplus or donated food to those in need. To mitigate these implementation risks and achieve success, countries are to elicit understanding on the modus operandi as well as health and wellbeing challenges of the food banking system. They are also required to establish the necessary legal, institutional, and regulatory frameworks to free the space and encourage private sector participation in food banking. Continued attention to social protection and complimentary programmes aiming at rebuilding livelihoods, increasing investment in economic activities, and promoting resilience to personal and livelihood shocks should be intensified. Finally, they also need to provide the needed food-consumption data and information at national, sub-national and community levels to aid private sector understanding of needs and where resources (food and non-food) could be obtained to meet the needs.

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**(xiii) Promote biosecurity and biosafety.**

Focus would be on ensuring pest and disease resistance management through early diagnostic services, vaccine development and supply as well as regenerative practices that allow intercropping and agroforestry to minimize fragility of monocrops and related high resource inputs that also make livestock more vulnerable from excessive exposure to chemical inputs. Infectious diseases such as pest attacks, avian flu and exotic viruses from wildlife as well as operational safety and security are key challenges to grapple with for this policy option to work. Given their high potential to transmit exotic viruses, establishing a biosecurity surveillance system and tools for identification and characterization of pests and diseases in wildlife given their high potential to transmit exotic viruses would help ameliorate the identified challenges. Crop diversification to build resilience and reduce reliance on imports and enhance revenues would be an appropriate augmenting action to take. Food technologies successfully developed in some of the countries in Africa should be scaled up in other countries. Practices that contribute to biodiversity conservation while also increasing agriculture productivity need to be prioritized.

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**(xiv) Adopt and embrace climate-smart agriculture.**

This helps to fortify the agriculture sector against the vagaries of climate and weather. It also promotes adapting and building resilience to climate change; sustainable increase in agricultural productivity and incomes; and mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. The caveat here, however, is that this is a new concept in Africa and may be difficult to implement. Knowledge transfer is needed from areas of the world that have been successful, have similar agro-ecological zones and are science-driven in their approach. This is an excellent area for South-South cooperation related to regenerative climate smart agricultural best practices. Countries need to mainstream climate-smart agriculture in their national



policies and programmes and catalyze transition to climate-smart agriculture through leveraging global climate finance and technical assistance. Countries should leverage FAO's efforts through the operationalization of a regional networks on CSA in East Africa and publication of various knowledge products. This also needs to be linked to the Africa Climate Smart Agriculture Vision 25X25. It is the African Union's vision of having at least 25 million smallholder farming households practicing Climate Smart Agriculture by 2025. It aims to help farmers in landlocked African countries, especially subsistence farmers and those highly dependent on seasonal rains, to face adverse climate change (higher temperatures, extreme weather events and drought). Leveraging this initiative would help African countries to accelerate climate smart agriculture.

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**(xv) Embrace Precision Farming.**

This concept refers to a farming technique based on observing, measuring and responding to crops inter and intra-field variability. Technology is required to drive the process. Yet, many African countries lack requisite technology and decision support systems (e.g. unmanned aerial vehicles, robots, drones, Global Positioning System (GPS) and Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS)) for this type of sophisticated farming. This challenge can be overcome by leveraging existing infrastructure such as smartphones which are owned by many farmers. Most smartphones are pre-installed with basic applications that could serve as starting point. Embracing precision farming could also help attract more youth to agriculture.

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**(xvi) Promote and enforce food safety and traceability.**

Food traceability reduces spoilage, contamination, disease and other food related challenges in the food supply chain by identifying and addressing food hazards before the affected products reaches the consumers. High cost of implementing end-to-end food traceability systems could put it out of reach of many African countries. Also, food traceability is a private sector-driven activity, with investment dependent on a blend of several exogenous factors that include consumer demands, efficiency gains, compliance with standards, risk mitigation, and varying incentives. To address these challenges, countries are to provide a conducive environment for food traceability process by establishing clear and unambiguous regulatory and policy environment for unencumbered private sector operations. Policy formulation needs to include dialogue with private sector to ensure effectiveness. African technologists are delving into high tech low costs alternatives to traceability using blockchain. Investments to grow these initiatives by African innovators need to be supported so that they can become viable with scale of use.

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**(xvii) Strengthen physical access to food production.**

Weak food distribution infrastructure makes delivery of food to the needy cumbersome and slow, thus weakening the food production base. One quick solution is for countries to diversify inter-State and inter-regional food supply chains to moderate impact of future shocks. There is also need for better soil health management and more investment in long-term land improvements.

**(xviii) Reverse land degradation and improve soil health.**

This is fundamental to resilience and diversification of agriculture. There need to be better identification of where certain soil constraints exist (e.g. low plain, high acidity, low biological activity) and then provide more education like extension and proffer means to tackle them.



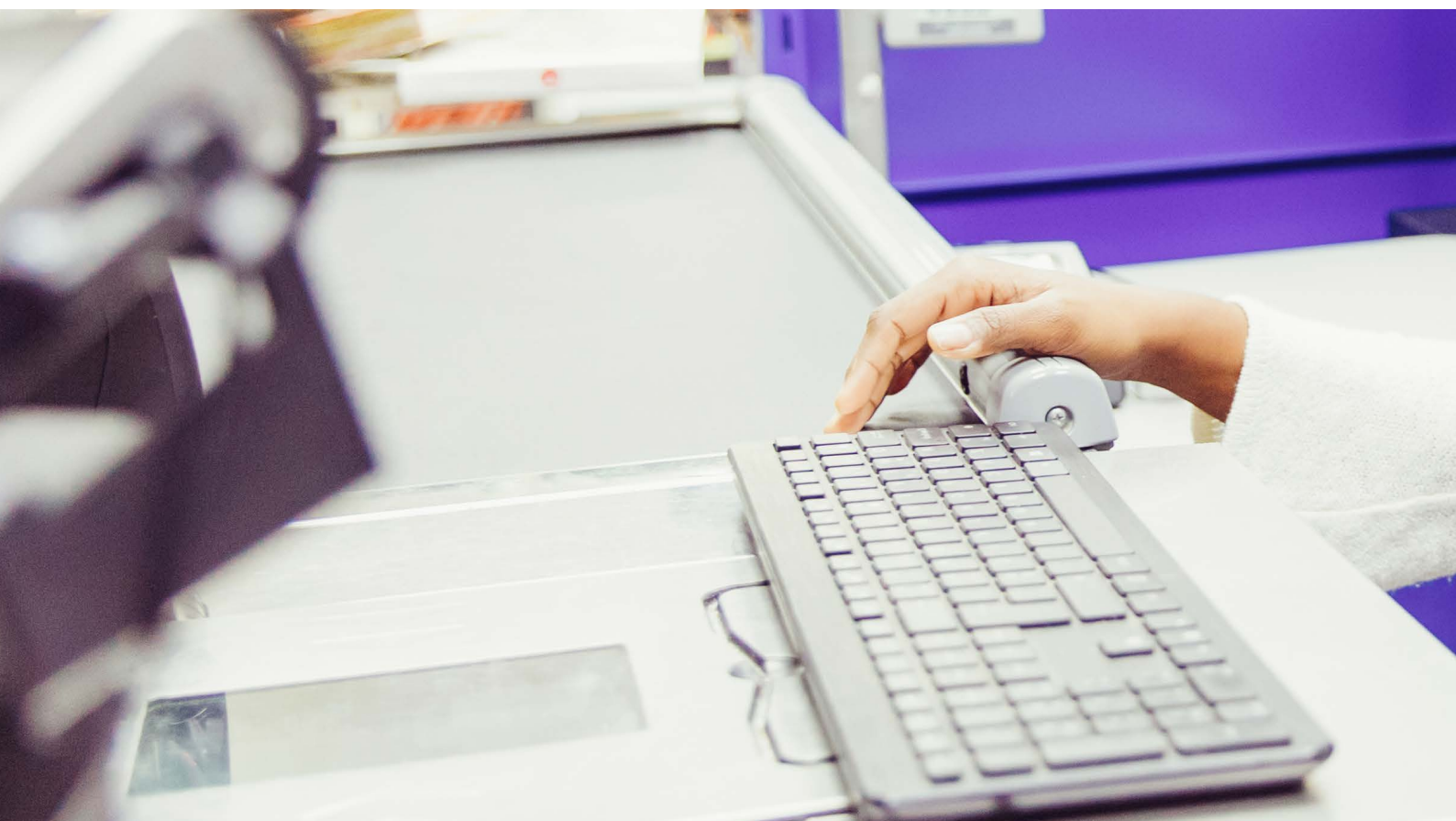


# 03 Policy Timing, Design, and Implementation

Whichever policy options are chosen, countries should pay attention to the policy design, sequencing, and the timing of implementation. Poorly designed recovery policy is likely to be ineffective in delivering desired economic outcomes regardless of theoretical potential. Countries are advised to avoid “copy pasting” policies designed for other contexts such as the “lockdown” policy. Policy-makers should proactively engage local experts and scientists to help them identify the appropriateness of policies in their local conditions. Furthermore, policymakers should map out the potential multiplier effects and co-benefits on other sectors of the economy at the policy design stage. It was noted that lack of capacity for policy implementation is also an ongoing concern on the continent. Policy design should include clear indicators of accountability and strategies for monitoring progress to maximize impact. National contexts and priorities differ and so should the policies targeted at addressing them. It is also crucial to engage stakeholders, including the private sector, farmers, processors, exporters and service providers, domestic and foreign investors, the civil society, NGOs, etc. to create incentives and enhance impact. Need also a clear identification of actors, responsibilities and timeline as well as establishing support institutions and programmes and a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for a successful implementation. A key principle for the implementation should be to work with or build on existing structures and mechanisms instead of creating additional layers to avoid duplication and the waste of scarce resources where applicable.

The G-CoP experts noted that policy timing, timeliness and flexibility in implementation will be important characteristics for achieving the desired outcomes. In the context of COVID-19, there are many known unknowns and unknown unknowns. It is yet unclear how long the pandemic will last and whether there will be recurrence after the first cycle. With the current nationalistic approaches to the prevention and containment measures, it is very likely that hotspots of the virus may remain in less developed countries, especially in Africa, for much longer. These could become future epicentres for another global spread of the virus. In addition, it remains unclear whether the estimated recession will be deeper than projected with possible default cascades. The discussion on the shape of the recovery of the economies remain unclear. It is yet to be seen whether economies will take the “V”, “U”, prolonged “U” or even a “W” or “L” shaped recovery path. Without a coordinated global action, the recovery path may likely be a multiple “W”, if there are multiple waves in future.

While extreme urgency was required in introducing prevention and containment policies, that were sometimes inappropriate for local conditions, successful policies for the recovery and rebuilding phase will be defined by appropriateness of the specific policies adopted to specific social, political, environmental, and financial contexts of actors. Equity considerations demand that recovery policies should not pass on significant liabilities to the future generations. Intergenerational inequities will be exacerbated within and among countries if policy responses to pandemics such as COVID-19 focuses on re-booting unlimited consumption. The COVID-19 lockdown and social distancing policies have exposed the significant inequities in the current economic system which focuses on maximizing current consumption to maximize GDP growth without much recourse to the externalities of social, human and natural capital, and the overall welfare of the current generation. The G-CoP experts encouraged African governments to not just focus on rebuilding the economy but to build back better – economies that focus on sufficiency, efficiency, inclusiveness, sustainability and equity.





# 04 Lessons Learned

**There are several useful lessons countries could learn from the experience on how the agriculture and food-related impact of COVID-19 pandemic was handled. A few of these are highlighted below.**

**(i) Cash (as opposed to food) transfers are helpful to preserve food demand and thus employment and income.**

The advantage of cash in the hands of the poor and vulnerable is that it gives them a good sense of security, enhances wellbeing and promotes happiness. Indeed, these are what is needed to make individuals more productive and build more socially-cohesive economies and communities, thus building long-term resilience. Belonging to social investment groups makes sense in times of disaster by serving as additional social security.

**(ii) To promote food security, domestic food supply chains should be more emphasized with less emphasis on food import outside of Africa.**

There is obvious instability in the global food security and the integrity of food systems. Overall, some level of self-production in selected food items is needed but supported by supply chains secured by legal agreement or ownership. However, the resilience to external food supplies shocks still need to be strengthened to augment domestic food production capacity. In this balancing act, supply security of safe and good quality food is critical.

**(iii) Digitization of production and value chains must be emphasized given its importance.**

Reduced physical interactions and promoting social distancing requires technology to the rescue. Need for digital technologies and skilling are inevitable. Robotization, cheaper renewable energy and climate change mitigation are imperative to shorten supply chains.

**(iv) Political commitment is indispensable.**

Food security and agricultural development need to be prioritized in the works of governments at all levels. Agriculture needs to be revitalized through significant investment. One good reason for this is the importance of sustainable food systems for job creation in Africa. Currently, around 1/3 of Africa's urban jobs are in the food system. Thus, political systems that prioritizes agriculture investment and finance for agriculture will pave way for empowering the people, contributing to building resilience and increasing agriculture's contribution to GDP.



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**(v) Innovation and technology are crucial in dealing with exogenous shocks that affect food supply systems directly.**

This would involve the use of Smartphone, agricultural e-platforms, drones, artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data, etc.

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**(vi) Effective management of rumors regarding food shortages is helpful in managing panic buying and would calm the consumers.**

Artificial scarcity has been a major feature of the pandemic in many African countries, driven by panic buying and hoarding. Successful countries have used an effective communication strategy to dispel rumors by pointing to its massive grain reserves backed by action of releasing reserves to the market to contain inflation. Strengthen international market transparency and governance mechanisms. Policy and stock management decisions should be based on timely and credible data on domestic and global supplies and prices. Improving market transparency and the availability of up-to-date data and information is imperative, particularly in periods of crisis when panic-driven reactions can aggravate trade disruptions. An excellent initiative in this regard is the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), an inter-agency platform launched by the G20 in 2011, and housed at FAO, to enhance food market transparency and promote the coordination of policy action in times of market uncertainty.

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**(vii) Infrastructure development is vital to improve domestic and international food supply chains.**

For example, IT infrastructure is a pre-requisite for e-commerce. Roads are indispensable for evacuating harvested produce from the farm and bringing them to the farmgate or urban markets.



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**(viii) Provide food producers the needed regular and sufficient income as well as legal/political security that would protect them from extreme price volatilities.**

Such frameworks would promote neglected tropical crops, especially perennials that have capacity to increase climate resilience and ensure food stocks in rural areas and urban kitchen gardens. Governments should help farmers through risks mitigation efforts (including climate risks) and hedging against extreme price volatility.

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**(ix) Instruments and policies that are put in place to fulfill the right to food for the vulnerable population, need to be timely and should not interfere with the local food markets.**

For example, to guarantee food security for the vulnerable, instruments like school feeding, cash for labor and voucher systems have proven to be the most cost effective with the least distorting impact in the markets

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**(x) Closing borders could mean starving your neighbor.**

Borders need to be open to allow for free movement of agricultural products from surplus areas to deficiency areas. Focus should be on effective management and implementation of travel protocols as well as regulation of Customs and, sanitary and phyto-sanitary regulations. It is crucial to address non-tariff barriers, especially food standards involving food control systems, accredited laboratories, etc. These are needed to expand intra-regional food trade and ensure open borders.

# 05 Conclusion

**F**ood is a basic need and is one of the most impacted activities by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to existing vulnerabilities, Africa is likely to be severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in various ramifications that include food availability and security. With the collapse of economies and loss of jobs, the social distancing, lockdowns and border closures designed to flatten the COVID-19 disease curve are likely to kill more than the virus in Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic is a reminder of the age-old value of nations being able to feed themselves. The African Development Institute (ADI) of the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) convened a Global Community of Practice (G-CoP) on COVID-19 response strategies to support countries with evidence-based policy response strategies, capacity development and technical assistance. Reliance on global supply chains has meant that most people or societies are disconnected from the real sources of their livelihoods in times of shock and lockdown. In this context, flexibility and choices are limited.

The G-CoP experts proffered several pragmatic policy recommendations available to national governments for promoting agriculture and food production and building resilience in the sector, structured into short, medium and long term. In the short term, the following policy options were recommended, among several others: save the bones (wholesale and retail markets) and arteries (SMEs in logistics and wholesale) of the food supply chain; provide coordination mechanism to deliver food safety nets to the vulnerable at national and sub-national levels; increase local food production levels; invest in new farming technology; allocate sufficient (more) budget to agriculture in line with the Malabo Declaration to develop innovative financing mechanisms for agriculture and food production systems; establish commodity exchanges; refocus trade policies on regional trade to promote intra-regional food trade. Implementation of this policy option could face three key challenges; establish National Agricultural Productivity Accelerators (NAPA) to support SMEs to ramp up production need to be established; develop agricultural e-commerce and delivery service system to match supply with demand at multiple levels should be developed; and incentivize youth and women engagement in agriculture requires incentivizing.

In the medium term: ramp up and strengthen local food production and distribution; build productive farmer business models; invest in agriculture and food production infrastructure, R&D, and smart technology development and deployment; develop National Agricultural Innovation Parks can be solutions; reorient policies towards self-sufficient farming canto promote food import substitution; institutionalization reform of agriculture-related activities and food production; deployment of fiscal incentives to encourage farmers, especially smallholder farmers; improve farm market technology; develop capacity by revamping agriculture and agribusiness and not just agriculture science; deliberately facilitation of private sector development and engagement in agriculture and food production; avoid public sector domination; reconsider the quality of food consumed by the people must ensure improvement in their health to build resilience to health shocks.; and improve Customs governance for free transportation and flow of food ought to be based on transparency and essential need for goods to flow.

The long-term policy options recommended by the G-CoP experts include: deepen agriculture diversification with less talk and more specific and focused action; digitize value chain; improve agricultural practices and food safety standards; human capital development, especially in the specialized agricultural universities and institutions locally and regionally; public-private partnerships for agro-allied industrialization; re-introduce and revamp Farmer Cooperatives, Marketing Boards and Commodity Exchanges and structure them as PPPs; commercialize agriculture and make it more profitable; increase investments in R&D significantly to innovate urban farming, future food & food science & technology; ensure strong political commitment to food security and food systems development; implement AU Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security and allocate at least 10 percent of national budget to agriculture development; establish early warning systems to minimise the effects of future disasters; establish food banks or similar systems; promote biosecurity and biosafety; adopt and embrace climate-smart agriculture; embrace Precision Farming; promote and enforce food safety and traceability; and strengthen food production.

Careful review as well as tailored and focused implementation of these policies hold high promise for African countries to contain the negative impact of the pandemic on agriculture and food production. This can strengthen jobs and livelihoods in laying the foundation for economic rebuilding, and develop the needed resilience to withstand, not just the current pandemic, but any future exogenous shocks.

**African Development Institute (ADI),  
African Development Bank Group**  
“Strengthening capacity for inclusive growth in Africa – without which  
the global sustainable development goals and Africa’s Agenda 2063  
will not be achieved”

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