

# **CELEBRATION OF THE 2020 UNITED NATIONS DAY FOR SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION**

The role of South-South and Triangular Cooperation in the transformation of food systems in view of COVID-19

## **Background**

Food is essential to sustaining life, and nutritious food is at the base of productive and healthy lives. Although the world, as a whole, produces more than enough food for everyone, up to one-third of this is either lost or wasted. The 2020 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI)<sup>1</sup> report shows that nearly 690 million people are hungry, or 8.9 percent of the world population – up by 10 million people in one year and by nearly 60 million in five years. The number of people affected by severe food insecurity, which is another measure that approximates hunger, shows a similar upward trend. In 2019, close to 750 million – or nearly one in ten people in the world – were exposed to severe levels of food insecurity. If recent trends continue, the number of people affected by hunger would surpass 840 million by 2030. Poverty, hunger and malnutrition clearly remain linked challenges, impacting the poorest people in the world and contributing to disease and reduced life expectancy.

The COVID-19 pandemic is placing significant stress on food systems, especially in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) and fragile states where food systems are already flawed or disrupted, threatening the food security and livelihoods of millions of vulnerable people. Particularly impacted are: 1) production, 2) trade and distribution, and 3) consumption, affecting actors and livelihoods along the food value chain from farmers, traders, processors, distributors, and retailers, as well as the millions of consumers that rely on their efforts to meet their basic food and nutritional needs. Production is likely to be affected from disrupted access to inputs, labour, services, and markets. Volatile global commodity markets, trade and border policies, movement restrictions and market closures threaten food trade and distribution networks. A preliminary assessment suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic may add between 83 and 132 million people to the total number of undernourished in the world in 2020 depending on the economic growth scenario<sup>2</sup>.

As a result, household food security is at an increased risk from income loss, price spikes, and volatile or reduced access to adequate and nutritious food. Sustaining, protecting, and improving food systems during the crisis is vital to

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/online/ca9692en.html#>

<sup>2</sup> 2020 SOFI report, see above fn.

reducing economic and food insecurity risks to communities, especially the most vulnerable, and enable a quicker and more inclusive and sustainable recovery. Effective and coherent action is required across national food systems in synergy with social assistance interventions.

### Improving Food Systems

In line with the Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations Secretary General (SG) announced, during the plenary of the 46th Session of the Committee on World Food Security held at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in October 2019, the decision to convene a Food Systems Summit. The Summit, which is scheduled to take place in 2021<sup>3</sup>, is aimed at empowering people to leverage food systems as accelerators of progress to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To this end, the SG has appointed a Special Envoy, Dr. Agnes Kalibata, President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), to drive this agenda. Consultations for the Summit will involve a broad range of stakeholders and partners in addition to the UN, such as the private sector, governmental and non-governmental organizations and civil society agencies. The range of stakeholders further confirms the UN's holistic approach to harnessing all actors in the fight to achieve "No Poverty" (SDG 1) and "Zero Hunger" (SDG 2), through strengthened partnerships and joint actions, also in line with SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), the three Rome-based Agencies (RBAs) representing the United Nations' food and agriculture hub, consider this Summit an important event. COVID-19 is not only affecting their own operations and their business continuity, but it is also, and more significantly, shaping the operating environment and effectiveness of national systems of host governments. The summit is therefore timely in that it provides a platform for reinvigorating global commitment to achieving the SDGs by building on targeted national and local actions and initiatives. To this end, the three agencies have agreed to work together to support the main objectives<sup>4</sup> of the Summit.

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<sup>3</sup> The exact date and location is yet to be announced by the UN Secretary-General.

<sup>4</sup> The objectives of the Summit are the following: (i) to raise awareness of how central sustainable food systems are and the urgency of food systems transformation; (ii) to align stakeholders around a common understanding of a food system framework as a foundation for concerted action, (iii) to recognize that governance of food systems must be inclusive governance and involve innovation; (iv) to motivate and empower stakeholders who are actively supporting food systems transformation at all levels; and (v) to catalyze, accelerate and scale action to transform current food systems into healthier more inclusive, equitable and environmentally sustainable food systems.

## The Role of SSTC and the RBAs in Transforming Food Systems in the context of COVID-19

Recent years have seen an increase in the efforts of international organizations to step up their endeavours towards supporting SSTC activities, pushed, inter alia, by requests from their member countries who encourage them to find new ways to support especially middle and low-income countries on their pathway to development. The importance of SSTC as a cooperation modality is recognised by FAO, IFAD and WFP. The three agencies are devoting time and attention to the role of collaboration and partnership in furthering their mandates of eliminating poverty, fighting hunger and malnutrition and delivering food assistance in emergencies.

SSTC can play an effective role in addressing challenges and vulnerabilities in food systems in the developing world, especially in view of the effects of COVID-19 and related shocks. For example, SSTC can support an enabling environment for the strengthening of food systems, enhance access of farmers to markets through e-commerce, and address challenges related to market price fluctuation. In addition, SSTC can act as a vehicle to increase the availability of technology, knowledge and resources to developing countries to help them address the impact of the pandemic. Such resources may include local innovations and lessons to either accelerate their response to the rapid spread of the pandemic or help mitigate its effects.

1. Given the similarities in the development contexts, challenges and trajectories among the developing countries, SSTC can play a key role in 'flattening the learning curve' and pooling of technical and financial resources, thereby **Identifying and sharing replicable and adaptable innovations, experiences and solutions** from the agri-food sector, food security and nutrition responses from around the world, especially from and among the developing countries;
2. **Mobilizing Southern expertise** through leveraging on existing networks, Communities of Practitioners, Centres of Excellence and Universities in the developing world;
3. **Promoting inter and intra-regional dialogue, cooperation and financing** of agri-food systems complementing and adding a multiplier effect to the North-South Cooperation recovery initiatives.

More specifically, as countries gradually move into the next phase of COVID-19 response, the RBAs believe that SSTC can play a key role in sharing experiences and lessons learned and by providing financial and technical support to affected countries.

FAO has responded to COVID-19 with immediate actions by: a) Providing information on food availability and advocating for free mobility of food across borders; b) Providing evidence-based policy advice; c) Implementing an array

of tools to support policy analyses and assess the impact of COVID-19 on food/agriculture, value chains, food prices and food security across the globe.

To tackle the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, IFAD has launched a multi-donor COVID-19 Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF), in alignment with the UN socio-economic response framework and complementing IFAD's broader COVID-19 response efforts. Created to help avert the food crisis, the RPSF seeks to improve the resilience of rural livelihoods in the context of the crisis, by ensuring timely access to inputs, information, markets and liquidity. In this context, SSTC can support countries at the operational level, ensuring that better practices on increasing resilience are exchanged in innovative ways.

In line with WFP's COVID-19 Medium Term Programme Framework, WFP has launched targeted initiatives for COs and host governments including, (1) the facilitation of innovation initiatives (in partnership with WFP's Innovation Accelerator in Munich) in order to help WFP COs to adapt WFP's South-South brokerage modalities and business model to a digital environment; and (2) the roll-out of COVID-19 SSC pilot projects and activities to support eight countries in four regions with seed funding support from China and WFP internal funds to reach vulnerable populations through food systems, social protection, school feeding, emergency preparedness and nutrition.

Through their individual and joint work in SSTC, the RBAs can therefore play a key role in supporting the most vulnerable and mitigate the impact of current and future challenges on food systems in developing countries. To support host governments during and in the aftermath of the pandemic, the RBAs need to rely on all available partners to join forces and address rising production challenges, food insecurity and nutrition needs in the developing world.

### Objective

When, more than a decade ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to commemorate South-South Cooperation each year on 12 September, the General Assembly sought to highlight the recognition of SSTC as an invaluable means for achieving sustainable development and improving the lives of billions of people in the global South and beyond.

For the fourth consecutive year, the RBAs are jointly organizing the celebration of this UN day. This year, the objective of the event is for the RBAs to raise awareness on how SSTC can support the transformation of food systems for the benefit of rural poor smallholder farmers, addressing COVID-19 related vulnerabilities and the needs of the people already at risk of being left behind.

The event will also provide an opportunity for the RBAs to renew their commitment to work together, supporting countries through SSTC. Three years after the release of the Joint Roadmap towards BAPA+40: Strengthening Collaboration among Rome-based Agencies on South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), FAO, IFAD and WFP will share their views of how SSTC



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can also support food systems transformation and address immediate and mid-term needs, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the RBAs will bring in examples of how their work is positively affecting the transformation of food systems.

Together with Government representatives, an interactive discussion will be held on how challenges, such as COVID-19, have impacted key aspects of food systems and affected their work of supporting smallholder farmers to improve their livelihoods.

### Format

The event will be hosted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, the event will be held virtually.

The celebration will last about 1 hour and 30 minutes to ensure a rich and dynamic discussion and the involvement of the audience. The moderator will hold an interactive session that will allow for the exchange of ideas and solutions among the panellists as well as the audience, who will be invited to ask questions and interact with the speakers.

The audience will comprise of Member States representatives, as well as academia, international organizations, private sector and CSO representatives.



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