



CONCEPT NOTE

EU-Africa Research and Innovation Partnership on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture

Introduction and background

The potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Africa's food and agriculture systems is cause for concern, as between 650 and 670 million people in Africa, about half the population, are already facing food insecurity. Of these, more than 250 million people are considered to be seriously food insecure. Most African countries have declared agriculture and related activities an essential service and have made an effort to keep borders, ports, and inland transport routes open. This has helped ensure that African food and agricultural systems retain some resilience allowing products to flow, with relatively stable prices, despite initial price picks caused by panic buying and some logistical bottlenecks. However, agricultural exports have faced severe disruptions in demand and supply chain problems, mainly due to lockdowns in Europe causing the closure of shops and restaurants and processing facilities.

Current and future challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic on African include:

- Reduce demand for food products: Loss of jobs and livelihoods and volatility in food prices could amplify the crisis through increased food insecurity.
- Disruption in trade (mainly crop export): lower demand in key markets can cause falling export benefits and increased volatility of prices, causing a global recession. Moreover, even when demand recovers, it may not be at pre-pandemic levels due to an economic recession leading to less consumption of high value food. This could lead to increased price volatility, depressed prices over time, or accumulation of excess stocks.
- Problems in crop production: COVID-19 could alter the availability of workforce due to travel limitations and sanitary measures and affordability of agricultural inputs and interruptions in logistics that could affect distribution. COVID-19 logistics bottlenecks could impede responses to the locust outbreak, for example by delaying the provision of the necessary means to protect crops.

Addressing such challenges require a mix of short term measures and longer term measures. Agricultural research is better equipped to address mid-term and long-

term changes. The EU-Africa Research and Innovation Partnership on food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture (HLPD FNSSA) has the potential to lessen the expected impacts of the pandemic described above in a way that will bring the added value of addressing this issue from a joint Africa Europe perspective. Since 2016 HLPD FNSSA is contributing to build resilient agro-food systems by pursuing a ten-year roadmap (2016-2026) with four priorities: 1) Sustainable intensification; 2) Agriculture and food systems for nutrition; 3) Expansion and improvement of agricultural trade and markets; and 4) A group of cross-cutting topics. For that, many research and innovation actions under Horizon 2020 (EU funding around 64 Million Euros) with success stories like e.g. LEAP-AGRI¹ project, the DeSIRA (allocated funding of 190 Million Euros) with success stories like e.g. FAIR-Sahel project² and the African Union Research grants (estimated EUR 32.2 million for 2016-2020) have been or are in the process of being implemented. These projects are compiled in the HLPD-FNSSA database.³

Building on the work of the partnership, the HLPD FNSSA has the potential to transform agricultural and food systems and provide greater resilience against threats such as climate change, pest outbreaks or exceptional situation such as COVID-19 in the longer term.

Objectives and Funding

The R&I support to the implementation of FNSSA partnership under Horizon Europe (2021-2027) will continue to help address priority areas to achieve food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture in Africa and in Europe. The R&I activities under the partnership will also contribute to the EU Farm to Fork Strategy by strengthening EU-AU efforts to build resilient agri-food systems tackling climate change, protecting the environment and preserving biodiversity as well as access to quality food, decent jobs and livelihoods. Alignment of activities, synergies and complementarities of support to African sustainable agriculture will be sought under the DeSira Initiative and EU funding to CGIAR and other international agricultural research networks. A safe and resilient African agri-food system is particularly important in the light of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, which will bring to bear the world's largest free trade zone, by country, offering a great opportunity for agri-food systems in Africa.

COVID-19 related R&I actions proposed:

1. Food System governance in crisis situations – Food Security and mapping

The Covid19 crisis has revealed the need to improve food system governance. A Research and Innovation action (RIA) will gather a wide range of expertise to provide guidance to improve food system governance in view of crisis situations.

¹ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/727715>

² <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/desira>

³ https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/leap4fnssa-projects?q=*

There is a need for the development of innovative methodologies/models to improve risk scenarios, building for agri-food security, taking into consideration the threat of pandemics, climate change scenarios and projections based on state of the art agri-food system assessment and complete understanding of food systems sustainability. In addition, it will promote innovations for the resilience of African food cities including rural small cities and address vulnerable population groups.

Price stability and system resilience is currently being assessed through the PANAP framework, in close link with AU-DREA and relevant African research centres, analysing the effects of the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, including COVID-19 relevant scenarios, at the continental, regional (REC) and country levels on local agri-food sectors.

Embracing digital technologies in the whole agri-food value chain will ease governance of the agri-food systems, supporting farmers to anticipate and assess potential food crises tackling in advance cascade effects strengthening the resilience of the agri-food chain.

The implementation of agro-ecological approaches will alleviate pressure of agri-food production on natural ecosystems, contributing to agri-food systems resilience and facilitating nature-based responses to current and future agri-food risks and threats. Agroecological transitions of food systems requires strong food governance with interventions at different level (local, territorial, and value chain) and coherent public policies.

2. One health approach: Plant and animal health

As showed by the ongoing challenges due to COVID-19 and the desert locust infestation in East Africa, the present situation put pressure both on domestic/local food production and on ecosystems that generate higher health risks with the emergence of new pest and diseases for plants, animals and humans.

“One health” approach is based on a systemic perspective linking the health of ecosystems, animals and humans. It requires interventions at different level (local, territorial, value chain) and coherent public policies.

There is a need to fill knowledge gap regarding interactions with different components and especially between human and animal health and strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to prevent the emergence and spread of pest and diseases with nature-based solutions.