Session 7
25 February 2021

- 17:00 - 18:45 Lilongwe
- 18:00 - 19:45 Addis Ababa
- 16:00 - 17:45 Paris
- 10:00 - 11:45 New York

Session 7

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE AND RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS IN AFRICAN LDCs

SUMMARY

Member countries face the challenge of transforming agri-food systems to ensure that no one is constrained to access healthy diets, but also that food systems are sustainable. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for countries. Thus, policymakers need to assess context-specific barriers, manage trade-offs and maximize synergies – such as potential environment gains – to achieve the required transformations. This session will explore the challenges and recommend solutions for deep, transformative change to redirect the arc of food systems evolution toward sustainable development.

The High-level Special Session provides an opportunity for participants to discuss and exchange information on issues of food security and nutrition and its connection to agri- food systems transformation in the context of Agenda 2030, giving special focus to innovative, sustainable, and inclusive approaches to accelerate this transformation in African LDCs. It also aims to enhance participants' understanding of the need to embrace a holistic approach and pursue accelerated actions along agri-food systems transformation to achieve Agenda 2030.
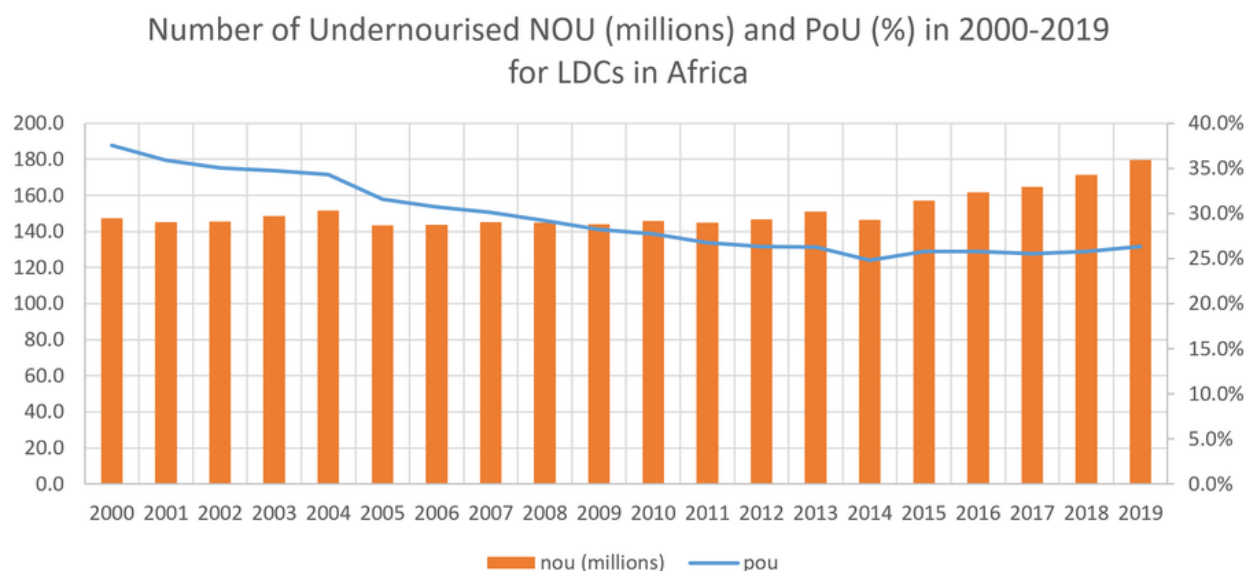
This session will commence with an overview of the current food and agriculture situation in LDCs by the Chief Economist of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Maximo Torero. This presentation will be followed by interactive deliberations among policy makers and other stakeholders and partners. Ministers of food and agriculture from the Africa LDC countries will share experiences on how their countries are addressing agri-food systems transformation in a holistic approach. Panelists drawn from farmers' organisations, the private sector, CSOs, academia/research community, and development partners share their perspectives on not only the challenges but also options and opportunities for sustainable transformation of the agri-food systems in LDCs.

BACKGROUND

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the central role that food systems play in overcoming the challenges the world faces today. This is especially relevant in Africa, especially, LDCs, with its vast potential in agriculture, which constitutes the most important source of livelihoods. Persistent poverty, deteriorating food security due to multiple natural and manmade threats and shocks, and the rise in malnutrition and undernourishment are, however, undermining African countries' potential for growth and prosperity. At the same time rapidly changing demographics, urbanization and socio-economic dynamics are increasing food demands and changing consumption patterns.

Africa is off track to achieve the goal of ending hunger by 2025 as stipulated in the African Union (AU) Malabo Declaration. Several African countries are also missing the target of achieving SDG2 by 2030. The prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) in sub-Saharan Africa has been on the rise in the past five (5) years, reaching 22.0 percent in 2019 (up from 21.2 percent in 2015). There were 235 million undernourished people in sub-Saharan Africa in 2019, an increase of 15.6 percent compared to 2015. Sub-Saharan Africa now stands out as the only region of the world where the number of extreme poor increased (from 276 million in 1990 to 413 million in 2015). Climate variability and extremes, conflict, and economic slowdowns and downturns, have been the main drivers – oftentimes-overlapping ones – of rising food insecurity and persistent malnutrition since 2014. [1] COVID-19, along with other shocks such as the Desert Locust have further exacerbated the already precarious situation.

Number of Undernourised NOU (millions) and PoU (%) in 2000-2019 for LDCs in Africa

Source: FAO, 2020

With 70 to 80 percent of smallholder farmers dependent on agriculture and renewable natural resources for their income, employment, food, nutrition and wellbeing, Africa's agriculture and food sector is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Over the last 10 years, climate extremes affected an average of 16 million people and caused an estimated USD 0.67 billion[2] in damage in Africa annually. This has led to greater pressures on limited natural resources such as land and water, provoking local disputes that also negatively impact food and nutrition security.

A paradigm shift is needed to balance agricultural production with the efficient use of natural resources, (such as maintaining biodiversity and mitigating adverse environmental effects associated with production). An agri-food systems approach can support such a shift. Agri-Food systems "gather all the elements (e.g. environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the output of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes". As such, a systems approach needs to encompass the wide range of public and private sector actors, as their interdependent activities and institutions are responsible for driving its success.

[1]FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2019. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019; and FAO. 2018. The Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition
[2]FAO. 2018. The Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition

Guiding questions:

- **1) What are the top issues that your country and/or organization is addressing to create and maintain sustainable food systems?**

- **2) The agri-food systems approach demands that players all along farm-to-fork spectrum work together. How can these stakeholders, who often have differing or even competing points of view, develop solutions?**

- **3) What are some of the main success stories in agri-food systems in LDCs in Africa?**