

## **Africa Dialogue Series High Level Policy Dialogue**

**Ms Maria Helena Semedo**

**keynote remarks**

**May 26 10:40 – 12:00 hrs (EST time)**

*sub theme 2: Strengthening the Resilience of Farming Systems: Land, Digital Transformation and Access to Finance – Making Small Holder Farmers the Back Bones.*

Ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed.

1. This is a crucial time for global and African food security.
2. As the UN Secretary General recently warned, mass hunger looms.
3. The Global Report on Food Crises, released this month by FAO and partners, revealed that 193 million people across 53 countries or territories are acutely food insecure, 119.6 million are in Africa.
4. Africa, with over 280 million undernourished people, is significantly off track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063.
5. Driving this grim picture are conflict, the climate crisis, and the economic fallout from COVID-19.
6. The Ukraine war is pushing up food and fertilizer prices, adding greater pressure on already-struggling African communities and compromising the next planting season.
7. Some 24 net-food-importing countries on the continent rely on Russia and Ukraine for more than 20 percent of their wheat imports.
8. Russia is also a major supplier of fertilizers to 12 African countries.
9. This, coupled with raising fuel prices, will aggravate the fragile fiscal balance of many African countries, already strained by the pandemic.
10. If we do not act now, we risk trapping generations of people in cycles of hunger and destabilization.
11. As highlighted by the FAO Director General at last week's UN Security Council, to prevent an acceleration of acute food insecurity, we must expand local cereal and vegetable production with cash and critical inputs; as well as protect livestock with treatments, vaccinations, feed and water.
12. FAO encourages four avenues of action to help countries build resilience and absorb shocks:

- One. Diversity. Diversity in input sources, production mixes, output markets, and supply chains. Diversity creates multiple pathways for absorbing shocks. The African Continental Free Trade Area is an excellent opportunity in this respect.
- Two. Connect people to markets. Well-connected agrifood networks absorb local disruptions by shifting sources of supply and channels for transport, marketing, inputs and labour.
- Three. Develop small and medium agrifood enterprises, cooperatives, consortia and clusters to maintain diversity in domestic agrifood value chains and limit impacts of both internal and external shocks.
- And Four. Build and strengthen resilience in rural low-income households, especially small-scale producers, through education, non-farm employment, cash transfers and access to basic services, such as clean water and sanitation.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

13. We must transform Africa's agrifood systems to be more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable.
14. This can only be done by empowering smallholders – the women, men and youth who are the backbone of the continent's agricultural production.
15. They can play a major role in transforming agrifood systems only if key enabling factors are in place.
16. They need secure equitable access to land, finance and technologies.
17. To benefit from expanding trade opportunities and digitalization, smallholders must have fair access to markets, timely market information, services, good rural infrastructure and digital tools.
18. As was often said during this series, we need to be inclusive so that appropriate technology reaches those who need it most, especially youth and women.
19. Digital transformation and access to data and information should be backed by solid science, policies, and institutions.
20. In this regard, strategic alliances and partnerships are core elements to transform Africa's agriculture and leverage science to achieve resilience.
21. We need to scale-up the quantity and quality of investment in sustainable land and water management and restoration of degraded terrestrial and marine ecosystems.

22. Resilient and productive ecosystems are the foundation of sustainable agrifood systems.
23. Investing in agriculture and rural livelihoods is 7 to 10 times more cost-effective than traditional emergency assistance and supports farmers to produce nutritious food locally.
24. Domestic and international financing strategies should be fully aligned to increase coherence and ensure that funding is directed where it is needed most – those producing our food.
25. Last, but far from least, we must absolutely focus on gender equality and women empowerment.
26. As we heard during this series, if we want to feed Africa, we have to start at household level. In this context, and when it comes to nutrition and well-being, women are at the centre.

**Distinguished guests, friends and colleagues,**

27. When countries committed to the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063, there was optimism that we could build a better future and a world without hunger.
28. Let's not lose that hope.
29. I call on all countries to double their efforts and work better together.
30. FAO stands ready to support Members in this call to action so we can have better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no-one behind.

Thank you

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