

## **High-Level Policy Dialogue of the Africa Dialogue Series 2022**

### **WFP AED Keynote Remarks**

I would like to warmly thank the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, and in particular Her Excellency Ms. Cristina Duarte, for giving WFP the opportunity to contribute to the 2022 Africa Dialogue Series and allowing me to take the floor in today's High-Level Policy Dialogue.

WFP has been honoured to co-lead with ILO the third week of this edition, which focused on a subject that deeply resonates with our work across the continent.

From providing cash transfers to making school feeding and other national social protection schemes more nutrition-sensitive and responsive to shocks, WFP has a long history of supporting African governments scaling up and enhancing safety nets for the most vulnerable. This includes providing support to over 30 countries in implementing social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

But we need to do more, and we need to act together.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

This year of unprecedented humanitarian needs sets off an alarm bell that we cannot ignore.

The joint impact of conflict, climatic shocks, and economic crises continues to drive food insecurity and malnutrition exponentially. The protracted socio-economic effects of COVID-19 and the rising costs of food and energy resulting from the conflict in Ukraine are expected to worsen this situation.

This year, over 100 million people across hotspot countries in the continent are projected to be in acute food insecurity – a stark 22 percent increase from just a year ago.

Further, millions of children will suffer from wasting, the most lethal form of malnutrition and one of the top threats to child survival. 6.3 million children in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal alone. This represents the fifth year in a row with record high levels of acute malnutrition across the region.

We cannot keep on doing business as usual. We need greater commitment, investments, and coordination if we want to address the nutrition challenges in the continent and strengthen resilience to future crises.

Social protection is a powerful tool to help the most vulnerable, mitigating the worst effects of economic crises, natural disasters, and conflict. It helps combat inequalities and creates a pathway to more stable and prosperous societies – leaving none behind as we go.

The discussion co-hosted by WFP and ILO last week has emphasized the urgent need to scale up and expand social protection, including through placing food security and nutrition front and centre in shock-responsive social protection mechanisms.

I would like to reiterate some of the key messages that emerged last week, during the ADS webinar facilitated by WFP and ILO.

First and foremost, to effectively advance nutrition for greater resilience in the continent, social protection must support inclusion, as diverse inequalities are often intersected with malnutrition.

In doing so, it is important to prioritize the needs of the most nutritionally vulnerable - such as infants, young children, pregnant, and breastfeeding women - and those for whom the gap is largest, who are unable to meet their nutrient needs.

This was well highlighted by the Honourable Minister Nivine El Kabbag, who talked about national social safety-nets targeting Egypt's most vulnerable pregnant women and mothers of children under 2 years of age, in collaboration with WFP and other partners, as part of the response to the COVID-19 crisis.

We also call on policymakers to deliberately incorporate food security and nutrition objectives into social protection strategies, policies, and programmes – to promote people's well-being now and in the future.

As highlighted by Her Excellency Amina Mohammed during the webinar, nutrition-sensitive school meals programmes are a key investment in the health and wellbeing of future generations, with multiplier effects on education, social cohesion, and economic development.

African member states have made enormous strides in expanding school meal programmes across the continent, increasing their budget allocations, adopting rigorous policy frameworks for school feeding, and improving the quality of school health and nutrition interventions.

The African Union, The African Union Development Agency NEPAD, and more than 29 African countries have recently joined the School Meals Coalition, committing to ensuring that all children, particularly the most vulnerable, have access to a healthy nutritious daily meal in school by 2030. This a crucial step towards reaching those 60 million children in the African continent who still do not have access to meals in school.

Lastly, WFP and ILO call on adopting resilient and shock-responsive approaches that better help people in managing risks during sudden emergencies or seasonal stressors, while promoting coordination among actors on the ground, across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

The example brought forward by the High-Commissioner of the Niger's 3N Initiative, His Excellency Ali Bety, demonstrates that preventive action, early warning systems, and improved coordination among different government bodies can indeed ensure greater effectiveness during recurring droughts, preventing deteriorations in the food security and nutritional status of the population.

This is in line with WFP's integrated resilience response in the Sahel, which links watershed planning and a variety of land rehabilitation programmes to nutrition assistance, school meals, and other activities, while supporting governments to strengthen their national early warning systems, capacities and structures.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

This year we have an incredible opportunity to progress towards the African Union Agenda 2063, with actions that can help mitigate the current crises and build a prosperous and equitable future for the continent.

Please, do not let this alarm bell go unheard.

WFP stands ready to support the African Union and its member states to shift the needle on malnutrition across the continent, ensuring better access to social protection systems that help meet food security and nutrition needs leaving none behind.

Thank you.