

Time to step up Africa's adaptation plans for food and nutrition security, Dr. Agnes Kalibata

In the last five years, Africa has endured several shocks and stresses – from locust and fall army worm attacks to droughts in Eastern Africa and floods in Southern Africa.

Most of us thought that COVID-19 was the last straw and we prayed that the camel's back would hold.

And it nearly did for most countries, until the current Russia-Ukraine crisis that has fueled multiple crises; conflict, fuel and food.

The real challenge and the reason the camel's back is now breaking, is the debt burden that African countries are sitting with. For these countries, stepping forward to support the private sector, farmers or vulnerable communities is not something they can do - however much they might want to.

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine is worsening the situation by limiting the supply of fertilizer – a critical agricultural input, and without which the continent's next few harvests will be severely compromised.

Africa was already not using enough fertilizers and as a result, still grapples with low yields. Total lack of fertilizers is likely to have catastrophic impact.

Yet the biggest threat for the continent remains climate change, which has drastically shifted rainfall patterns and accounts for the perennial droughts and floods being experienced around the continent.

"Africa's biggest challenge is the frequency and ferocity of climate change Climate change on top of the Russia-Ukraine crisis is going to have dire implications on food security in the months ahead," said, Dr. Agnes Kalibata, President, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

Dr. Kalibata was speaking at an African Dialogue Series webinar that brought together policy and decision-makers, civil society, experts, and academia to discuss the strategies for building resilient socio-agricultural food systems, with a leaning on nutrition.

A turnaround away from the looming climate change and nutrition crisis, according to Dr. Kalibata, is pegged on how quickly and effectively adaptation plans are implemented, starting with financing.

"The annual adaptation costs in developing countries are estimated at US\$70 billion and African countries need to spend up to 9 per cent of the cost of their GDP for adaptation programs...except now when coming out of COVID-19, many of them are suffering a huge debt burden, and are not investing as they should."

"It is really important that we continue thinking about how to increase our adaptation budgets and that countries come through on their promise on adaptation," she said.

Her remarks further drew from the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, which saw 49 African countries commit to transforming their food systems through national pathways. As these countries start to unfold

their pathways it is clear that sustainable and equitable food systems strategies will have to be anchored in climate adaptation.

“It is important that we follow up quickly and ensure that these countries come up with plans that translate pathways into priorities on food security, resilience and adaptation and better nutrition,” she said, adding that “It is important that we move from dialogues to investment plans and flagships that give opportunities to countries to focus our attention on the type of investments they need to end hunger, improve resilience and better nutrition.”

Dr. Kalibata used the opportunity to invite key food system stakeholders to the African Green Revolution Forum (**AGRF**) in Kigali, Rwanda, from 5 to 9 September this year, where she noted that more deliberations will be made on how to fast-track Africa’s adaptation and nutrition transformation agenda.

“AGRF partners will be showcasing the first three or four countries that have prepared investment plans... my call is that we work together to support these countries efforts” she said.

“We must continue to work on coming through together; there is no part of the world that can survive this alone; we need to ensure that the communities that are most exposed to climate change, that are suffering from nutrition and lack of resilience can have a better life for their children, which can only happen if we come through on the adaptation promises made to date,” she added.

The session was moderated by AGRA’s Vice-president of Program, Innovation and Delivery, Aggie Konde, and had a keynote address from Cristina Duarte, the Special Adviser on Africa to the United Nations Secretary-General. Other speakers were Dr. Godfrey Bahigwa, the Director of Agriculture and Rural Development at the African Union Commission; Lawrence Haddad, the Executive Director of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition; Robert Bertram, a director at USAID’s Office of Agriculture, Research and Technology; Dr. Bekele Shiferaw, the Lead Development Economist at the World Bank, and ILRI’s General Director, Dr. Jimmy Smith.

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/IgfdMcpVeT0>