

Africa Dialogue Series: Webinar

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

**Opening Remarks on behalf of Mr. QU Dongyu, Director-General of the Food
and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
by Ms Ismahane Elouafi, Chief Scientist, FAO
11 May 2022, 9:00 to 10:30 AM (EST)**

1. It is an honor to provide the opening remarks, on behalf of FAO, to this important webinar as part of the Africa Dialogue Series, which has been organized in conjunction with the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA).
2. Hunger in Sub-Saharan Africa is worsening.
3. Last week FAO and its partners launched a new report on hunger crises around the world.
4. In 2021 some 193 million people experienced acute food insecurity - an additional 40 million compared to the already record-high numbers of 2020.
5. Three out of the four countries facing the most severe phase of acute food insecurity, that are classified as Catastrophe, are in Sub-Saharan Africa.
6. This is on top of a severe drought that is tightening its grip on East Africa, economic repercussions from the COVID-19 pandemic, shortfalls in cereals and fertilizer from the Ukraine war and the fastest rise in food prices since 2008 – all of which pose significant risks to food security and nutrition in many African countries.

7. And with this, we are losing our natural capital to desertification and deforestation, biodiversity is declining and, with it, the resilience of our agrifood systems.
8. In April, FAO organized its Regional Conference for Africa, hosted by Equatorial Guinea, where many Agriculture Ministers and other partners discussed how, together, we can strive to boost the resilience of small-holder farmers, who are the backbone of rural development.
9. In fact, this is a key component of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031 which seeks to support the 2030 Agenda through the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind.
10. We only have 8 years before achieving the globally-agreed Sustainable Development Goals.
11. Without extraordinary efforts in the region, it will be difficult to meet these aspirations.
12. The Four Betters reflect the interconnected economic, social and environmental dimensions of agrifood systems and instill a strategic and systems-oriented approach within all of FAO's interventions.
13. Let me give you some examples how countries can spur action by localizing the Four Betters into their own planning towards 2030.
14. FAO's **1000 Digital Villages** initiative aims to equip rural communities with the digital tools they need for rural transformation and prosperity.

15. Piloted in seven African countries, FAO is collaborating with entrepreneurs and other partners to offer farmers a range of information services through digital and mobile channels.
16. One Country One Priority Product is another initiative recently launched in Africa which aims to support countries to develop and green value chains of special agro-products in ways that are inclusive, profitable, and environmentally sustainable.
17. We also continue to work with countries through the Hand-in-Hand Initiative which promotes digital agriculture and identifies gaps in rural transformation and matches countries with partners to deliver tangible results. It is supported by a geospatial data platform powered by FAO's wealth of data.
18. Moving from rural areas to urban landscapes, FAO's Green Cities Initiative aims to introduce innovative solutions to integrate agrifood systems, urban and peri-urban agriculture, and urban forestry into local planning. Its Regional Action Programme for Africa is already showing tangible results.
19. All these initiatives are country driven and country owned and underscore the interlinkages between the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.
20. The most important ingredient is political will and understanding the urgency to act now with adequate investments, policies, strong institutions, science, data and information, digitalization.
21. FAO is developing its first-ever Science and Innovation Strategy, which will be a key tool for the implementation of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and will strengthen the use of science and innovation in FAO's technical interventions and normative guidance.

22. And, recognizing the need to address climate change impacts on agrifood systems, we are updating *FAO's Strategy on Climate Change*.
23. FAO will also organize its first-ever Science and Innovation Days in early October. These two and a half days will build on the success of the "Science Days for the UN Food Systems Summit 2021" that was organized by the Scientific Group and facilitated and hosted by FAO last year.
24. The Science and Innovation Days will focus on highlighting the centrality of Science, Technology and Innovation for agrifood systems transformation. The event will encourage a diversity of perspectives based on science, thereby facilitating rationalization and inclusiveness of debate.

Ladies and gentlemen,

25. Transforming our agrifood systems to be more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable is an urgent task for all of us.
26. Let us work together to build the resilience of our farming systems and smallholder farmers.
27. I wish you a rich discussion.

Thank you.