



**Economic Commission for Africa
Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**

Tenth session

Addis Ababa (hybrid), 23–25 April 2024

Item 8 (b) of the provisional agenda*

**Parallel meetings for an in-depth review of progress made,
peer learning and acceleration actions regarding the sub-
themes of the Regional Forum: zero hunger****Background report on the sub-theme of zero hunger****I. Introduction**

1. The aim of Sustainable Development Goal 2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and goals 1, 3 and 5 under aspiration 1 of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union is to end hunger, attain food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. This remains a high priority in African regional and national development agendas. Since 2003, African leaders have been emphasizing the importance of increasing domestic food production to fight hunger and all forms of malnutrition. A priority of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme is the implementation of national and regional agriculture investment plans to improve agricultural production and, consequently, national and regional food security and nutrition. In 2014, in the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods, African Heads of State and Government committed to ending hunger on the continent by 2025. In addition, through Agenda 2063, heralded as the continent's road map for development, further emphasis was made on the advancement of health and nutrition as a key priority.

2. Complementing these tireless efforts, the African Union Commission endorsed the Africa Regional Nutrition Strategy 2015–2025,¹ in line with the first 10-year implementation plan (2014–2023) of Agenda 2063. A common African position on food systems was presented at the United Nations Food Systems Summit, held in 2021, with a focus on catalytic policy options and strategies to build food sovereignty and resilience on the continent.

3. With six years remaining before 2030, it is necessary to reflect thoroughly on the progress made towards meeting Sustainable Development Goal 2, in order to galvanize accelerated action. As the milestone for ending hunger in Africa by 2025 approaches and preparations are being made for the second 10-year implementation plan (2024–2033) of Agenda 2063, it is crucial for Africa to develop strategies for achieving the Goals. The present background paper contributes significantly to this endeavour. The paper was developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), with significant contributions from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United

* ECA/RFSD/2024/1/Rev.3.

¹ Available at <https://au.int/en/documents/20220401/africa-regional-nutrition-strategy-2015-2025>.



Nations Industrial Development Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and the World Food Programme (WFP). The paper contains a detailed analysis of a number of Goal 2 indicators, with a view to illustrating the state of food security and nutrition in the region and initiating a discussion on the prevalent challenges and opportunities in the ongoing fight against hunger. The aim is to inform discussions and decisions at the upcoming tenth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and the high-level political forum on sustainable development and to provide input for the crafting of the second 10-year implementation plan. In its conclusion, the paper provides recommendations to accelerate progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2.

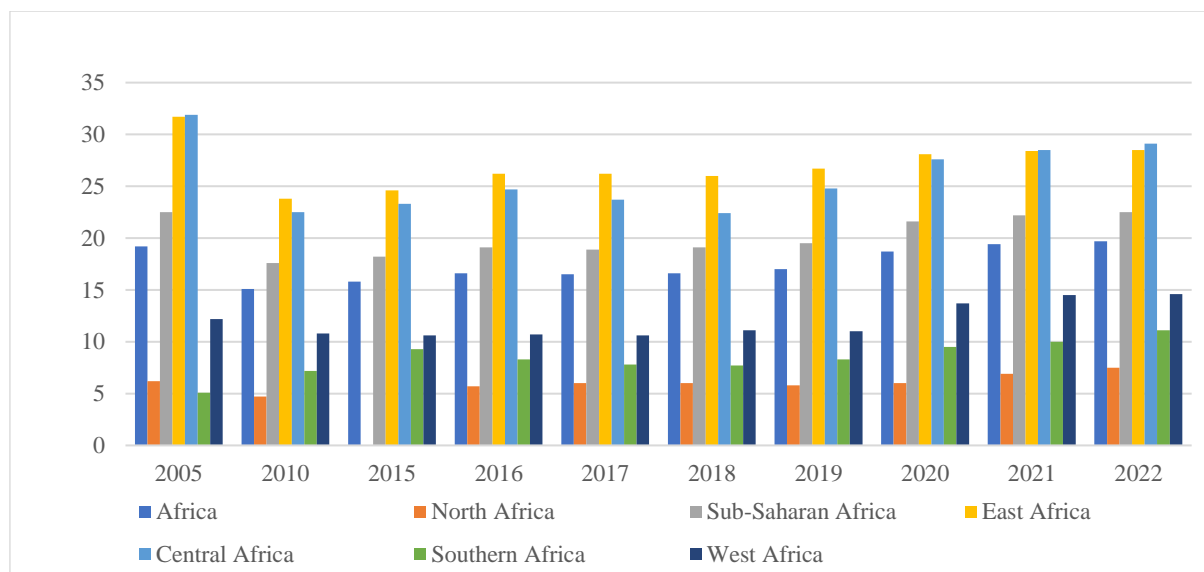
II. State of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in Africa

A. Ending hunger (indicator 2.1.1)

4. Evidence shows that Africa is not currently on track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 by 2030, nor is it poised to meet the commitment made in the Malabo Declaration to end hunger by 2025. This also jeopardizes the potential achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals. A report published in 2023 by FAO and other organizations revealed alarming trends regarding food security and nutrition in Africa.² The prevalence of undernourishment, a measure of chronic hunger, increased from 15.1 per cent in 2010 to 19.7 per cent in 2022 (see figure I). The number of people facing hunger has increased by 11 million since 2021 (from 270.6 million in 2021 to 281.6 million in 2022) and by a staggering 61 million since the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. With 29.1 and 28.5 per cent of the population undernourished, the Central African and East African subregions, respectively, experienced the highest proportion of undernourished people in 2022. This distressing hunger crisis is expected to worsen significantly by 2030.

² FAO, ECA, African Union Commission and WFP, *Africa: Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023 – Statistics and Trends* (Accra, FAO, 2023). See also FAO, International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNICEF, WFP and World Health Organization (WHO), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023: Urbanization, Agrifood Systems Transformation and Healthy Diets Across the Rural–Urban Continuum* (Rome, FAO, 2023).

Figure I
Prevalence of undernourishment in Africa
 (Percentage)

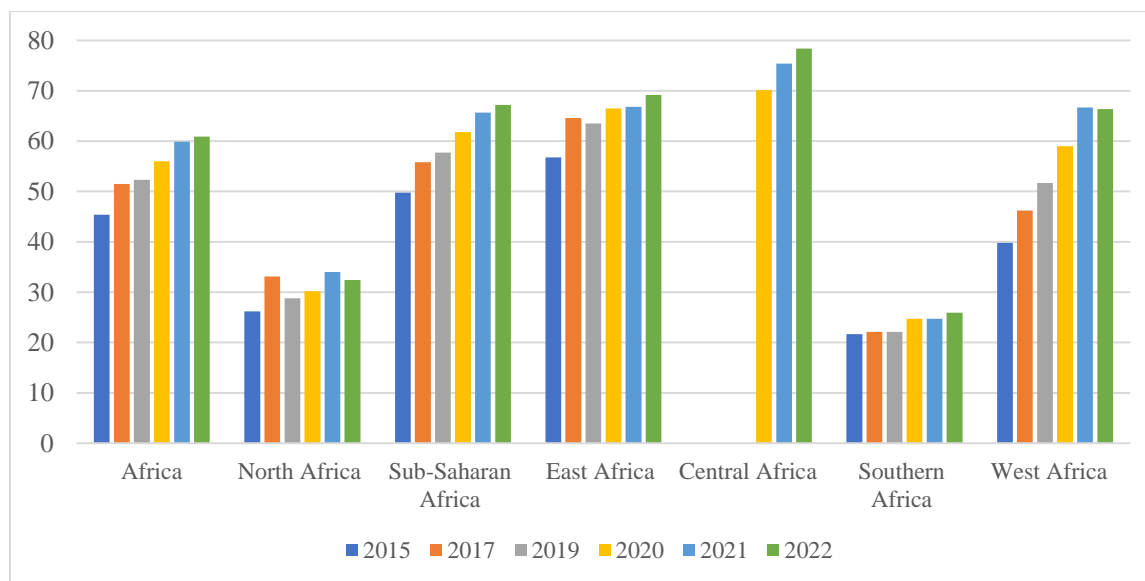


Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Economic Commission for Africa, African Union Commission and World Food Programme, *Africa: Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023 – Statistics and Trends* (Accra, FAO, 2023).

B. Food security (indicator 2.1.2)

5. The level of food security in Africa, a crucial factor in reducing hunger and malnutrition, remains alarming. According to the 2023 report on food security and nutrition in Africa, the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity increased from 45.4 per cent in 2015 to 60.9 per cent in 2022. Moderate or severe food insecurity increased by 1 per cent between 2021 and 2022 and by 8.6 per cent between 2019, before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 2022 (see figure II). The increase was particularly prominent in East Africa, Central Africa and West Africa as a result of a combination of factors, including but not limited to major droughts, conflict and civil insecurity, high levels of inflation (for food, fuel and fertilizer) and a general economic slowdown in many countries in these subregions.

Figure II
Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in Africa
 (Percentage)



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Economic Commission for Africa, African Union Commission and World Food Programme, *Africa: Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023 – Statistics and Trends* (Accra, FAO, 2023).

Note: Data for 2015, 2017 and 2019 are not available for Central Africa.

C. Nutrition (indicator 2.2.1)

6. While there has been a decrease in the prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age in Africa, declining from 34.4 per cent in 2012 to 30.0 per cent in 2022, the region still falls short of achieving the nutrition goals of Sustainable Development Goal 2 by 2030. Unfortunately, the absolute number of children affected by stunting in Africa has increased, from 61 million in 2012 to 63 million in 2022. The pace of progress in reducing stunting, as measured by the average annual reduction rate, is insufficient, standing at a mere 1.3 per cent in 2022. The overall decline in the prevalence of stunting conceals subregional disparities. Central Africa in particular continues to grapple with a staggering 37.4 per cent prevalence of child stunting, the highest among African subregions. Unfortunately, there has been little improvement compared with the 37.9 per cent recorded in 2012 for that subregion. Despite some progress, the prevalence of stunting in Africa remains the highest compared with other regions.³

D. Agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers (indicators 2.3.1 and 2.3.2)

7. Small-scale food producers experience lower productivity compared with their large-scale counterparts. The scarcity of comprehensive data on the productivity and incomes of food producers poses a challenge in discerning global trends over time. An examination of available data for nine countries in Africa reveals a distinct contrast between large- and small-scale producers. The productivity of small-scale producers tends to be approximately one third to

³ UNICEF, WHO and World Bank, *Levels and Trends in Child Malnutrition: Key Findings of the 2023 Edition* (New York, UNICEF and WHO, 2023).

one half that of large-scale producers. In addition, the average annual income of small-scale producers lags behind that of larger-scale producers, generally by a factor of two, with the gap widening over time in such countries as Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria and Senegal. Another noteworthy finding is that, while the productivity of men and women small-scale food producers is generally similar, the incomes of women are almost always smaller compared with those of men, corroborating a large gender pay gap.

E. Diversity of plant and animal genetic resources (indicator 2.5.1)

8. There is a pressing need to expedite the global response to the escalating threat of climate change to effectively safeguard crop and crop-associated diversity. While there was a significant rise in gene bank holdings in Africa from 2016 to 2021, marking a notable increase in efforts to safeguard crop diversity, the global initiative to protect such diversity in compliant ex-situ facilities has not kept pace with the escalating threats. Furthermore, regarding animal genetic resources, it is evident that the number of endangered breeds is unlikely to be substantially reduced in the near future. Consequently, countries should increase their efforts to adequately preserve genetic material in the light of these challenges. As at the end of 2023, the number of local and transboundary breeds for which sufficient material was stored was alarmingly low, with sufficient material stored for only 2.0 per cent of local breeds (18 of 805) and 9.2 per cent of transboundary breeds (35 of 270) on the continent.⁴

F. Local breeds at risk of extinction (indicator 2.5.2)

9. A consistent or declining proportion of endangered breeds may be seen as a positive indication of progress towards Sustainable Development Goal target 2.5. Nevertheless, the continent is still far from ensuring the genetic diversity of farmed and domesticated animals. Furthermore, the limited availability of updated data in numerous countries hinders a meaningful evaluation of global and regional outcomes. Despite this constraint, the most recent data reveal a marginal decrease in the number of endangered breeds in Southern Africa, while the other subregions have remained stable or experienced slight increases in that regard.

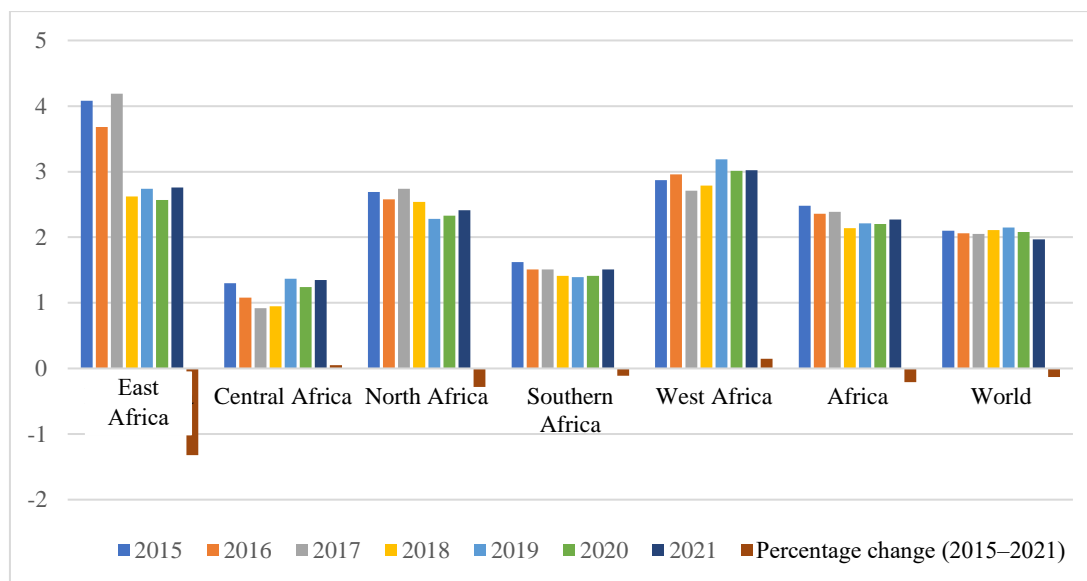
G. Investment in the agriculture sector (indicators 2.a.1 and 2.a.2)

10. Investment in the agriculture sector has declined across Africa, except in West Africa. Agriculture is the backbone of many African economies, and public and private spending is vital to fostering agriculture-led growth and food system transformation. Globally, the share of government expenditure on the agriculture sector declined by about 0.13 percentage points between 2015 and 2021. During the same period, Africa experienced a larger decline (0.21 percentage points), with East Africa showing the largest reduction (1.32 percentage points) and West Africa showing an increase of 0.15 percentage points (see figure III).⁵

⁴ FAO, "Ex situ (SDG 2.5.1.a)", World Information and Early Warning System on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Available at www.fao.org/wIEWS/data/ex-situ-sdg-251/overview (accessed on 10 January 2024).

⁵ Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Database (accessed on 10 January 2024). For information regarding the associated targets and indicators of Agenda 2063, see <https://iprt.uneca.org/agenda/agenda2063/overview/22>.

Figure III
Share of government expenditure on the agriculture sector
 (Percentage change)



Source: Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Database (accessed on 10 January 2024).

H. Price of food (indicator 2.c.1)

11. In Africa, a confluence of domestic factors, including adverse weather events, currency depreciation and political instability, along with conflict in central Sahelian countries and production shortfalls in East Africa, increased pressure on food prices in 2021. Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa experienced high food prices in 2021, reaching 40.9 per cent and 20 per cent of countries in those subregions recording abnormally or moderately high food prices, respectively. In addition, increased spending on imported agricultural inputs and food items contributed to the price hikes. Indeed, sub-Saharan Africa, being one of the most import-dependent subregions for fertilizers, saw a year-on-year increase of over 50 per cent in its import bill for agricultural inputs in 2021. Moreover, its food import bill rose by 20 per cent year-on-year in 2021, surpassing the global increase of 18 per cent, reflecting the subregion's heavy reliance on imported food items.⁶ Given the low-income profile of most households, rising food prices in Africa has severely affected household food purchasing power. Coupled with the rise in the cost of living, this can lead to a shift in dietary composition from nutrient-dense food items to less nutritious but more affordable diets consisting of highly processed, nutrient-poor food products. Consequently, the number of Africans who cannot afford healthy food has increased, reaching about 80 per cent of the population in 2022, while an estimated 145 million children under 5 years of age on the continent live in food poverty.⁷ The shift towards less healthy alternatives, alongside a reduction in the quantity of food consumed due to insufficient resources, adversely affects nutrition outcomes and hinders the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 2.

⁶ FAO, "SDG indicators", Corporate Database for Substantive Statistical Data. Available at www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/SDGB (accessed on 10 January 2024).

⁷ FAO, ECA, African Union Commission and WFP, *Africa: Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023*.

III. Implementation challenges and opportunities

12. The shortfalls in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 in Africa stem from structural and technical hurdles in both the supply of and demand for food and from mutually reinforcing shocks that have undermined various development endeavours. Several such shocks, including drought, desert locusts, COVID-19, conflict, civil insecurity and inflation, are currently wreaking havoc in the region and severely affecting the livelihoods of marginalized groups. These recurrent shocks have forced Governments to divert critical resources from development interventions to crisis-and-emergency management, which has undermined the attainment of medium- and longer-term development goals.

A. Challenges

1. Inadequate development of policies and regulations

13. Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2 in Africa can be hastened through policy interventions aimed at creating an enabling environment and incentives (and disincentives) in various areas to support increased food security and improved nutrition. It is, therefore, pivotal to scale up the implementation of policies, programmes and regulations focusing on irrigated agriculture, food trade, employment and poverty reduction, nutrition, financial access, renewable energy, food safety, post-harvest loss, nutrition-sensitive agriculture and fiscal measures. Furthermore, social protection and safety programmes should be expanded, and land governance systems should take into account the needs of vulnerable groups, such as young people and women, to ensure that no one is left behind.

2. Vulnerability to climate shocks and stressors

14. Heavy dependence on climate- or nature-related economic activities on the one hand and low adaptive capacity to climate variability on the other make Africa highly vulnerable to climate shocks and stressors, necessitating urgent investment in climate resilience. The impact of climate change, along with other structural challenges, hampers economic growth and development, which, in turn, undermines food security and nutrition on the continent. Recent droughts and floods in East Africa have displaced millions, escalating acute food insecurity and child malnutrition, notably in the Greater Horn of Africa, with 61 million people in phases 3, 4 or 5 of the acute food insecurity scale of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. Furthermore, about 11.5 million children under the age of 5 are estimated to be facing acute malnutrition.⁸

3. Indebtedness and lack of sufficient funds

15. Africa is facing a conundrum in which countries are dealing with financial austerity while striving to invest consistently in essential services towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Financial challenges resulting from soaring food prices, rising energy costs, high debt service costs and weak local currencies against the United States dollar have driven Africa further into a financial predicament. It would even be hard for most African countries to fulfil one of the primary commitments under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme to spend at least 10 per cent of budgetary allocations on agriculture. Innovative financing mechanisms, such as the effective mobilization of tax revenues, debt-for-climate swaps, the reallocation of special drawing rights towards investment in food and nutrition programmes in Africa and the forging of public-private partnerships that

⁸ WHO, "Situation report: 1 July–31 August 2023: Greater Horn of Africa food insecurity and health – grade 3 emergency", 2023.

mobilize domestic and foreign private sector investment in green and blue bonds, are crucial for the sustainable implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

4. Insufficient breadth and depth of partnerships

16. African countries and such regional organizations as the African Union have forged several global and regional partnerships to spur socioeconomic development in the region and to manage conflict and secure peace. Such partnerships are essential to leverage coordinated policies, strategies and institutions, share knowledge and information, assist in the implementation of best practices and forge coalitions for collective negotiation and the development of common positions. However, given the diverse interests of global powers, African leaders need to reassess global partnerships against national, subregional and continental aspirations in order to maximize the benefits for their citizens.⁹ Partnerships also need to be aligned with priorities and strategies for food and nutrition security (such as national agriculture investment plans, national pathways for food system transformation, and national and regional multisectoral nutrition policies and strategies) that have been agreed upon at the national, subregional and continental levels.

5. Gaps in data needed to monitor progress and inform decisions

17. The problem of poor-quality and insufficient data is still of significant concern in tracking performance on the Sustainable Development Goals. Tracking progress on the Goal indicators is necessary to identify areas in which remedial action is needed. There is, therefore, a dire need to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems to collect, collate, analyse and communicate high-quality data. The standardization, coordination, advancement and harmonization of national statistical systems is imperative for ensuring compatibility. Data limitations, which are primarily due to a lack of sufficient communication and collaboration among line ministries, departments, national statistical offices, non-State actors and custodian agencies involved in statistical activities, pose a critical challenge to measuring performance in Africa. Although digital transformation is vital to ensuring the management of timely and high-quality data across sectors, progress in this regard remains notably low throughout the continent.

6. High post-harvest losses and low value addition

18. The challenges to achieving zero hunger in Africa are further compounded by high levels of post-harvest losses. According to the African Union Commission, these losses, estimated at 100 million metric tons per year, are so significant that they could meet the annual food requirements of approximately 48 million people.¹⁰ Despite this alarming fact, the predominant approach to ending hunger in Africa is merely to increase food production. A more balanced and effective strategy would be to address the issue of post-harvest losses while increasing production. By allocating resources to and prioritizing investment in post-harvest management infrastructure, technologies, post-harvest handling techniques, value addition and market linkages, Africa could move closer to achieving zero hunger. African countries urgently need to implement the strategy of the African Union to manage post-harvest losses of food and horticultural crops, livestock and fishery products.

⁹ Nebiyu Meshesha, "Implementing the second ten-year plan of Agenda 2063: areas to focus on", Wilson Center, 29 March 2023.

¹⁰ African Union Commission, *Post-Harvest Loss Management Strategy*, August 2018.

B. Opportunities

1. Reaffirmed political commitment and strengthened calls for reform

19. In its journey to implementing the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, Africa could benefit from emerging technological, financial and partnership opportunities. Convened at the halfway point to the 2030 deadline, the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, held in 2023, resulted in a renewed commitment by Governments to identify new initiatives and opportunities to fast-track progress on the Goals.¹¹ Reforming the international financial architecture is pivotal to increasing financial flows to developing countries, which is a prerequisite for relieving debt stress and closing gaps in infrastructure development. The Summit of the Future is expected to amplify and embolden, among other things, the initiatives and opportunities identified at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, including the possibility to fine-tune multilateral systems of governance to put into action the priorities agreed upon in the political declaration adopted at the Summit.

2. Renewed calls for climate financing

20. In the African Leaders Nairobi Declaration for Climate Change and Call to Action, adopted in September 2023 at the inaugural Africa Climate Summit, African Heads of State and Government called for urgent collective action at the continental and global levels to honour the commitment to raise \$100 billion in annual climate funding, which could contribute immensely to building climate-resilient economies and addressing climate-related shocks in Africa. Similarly, the pledge in the Declaration to formulate and implement policies, regulations and incentives designed to attract local, regional and global investment in the area of green growth could encourage private sector investment along agrifood value chains. Elevating the profile of nutrition across various areas of climate financing (such as health, agriculture and social protection) will also be critical, as reflected in the multi-agency position paper entitled “From commitment to action: integrating nutrition financing in the climate change framework”, announced by the African Union Nutrition Champion at a side event to the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in 2023.¹²

3. Movement from silos to systems

21. Universal agreement on the six areas of transition for the Sustainable Development Goals is instrumental to galvanize policies, strategies, investment and partnerships in an integrated and systemic way to leverage synergies and minimize trade-offs. The six areas of transition are: food systems; energy access and affordability; digital connectivity; education; jobs and social protection; and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.¹³ By now, countries are expected to have adopted national investment pathways in an integrated manner and in alignment with each of the six areas of transition, thereby focusing investment to achieve equitable and long-term sustainable development in a manner that leaves no one behind. Identification of the six areas of transition also provides an opportunity to systematically converge the efforts of donors and the development community to capitalize on synergies, harness expertise and best practices and avoid duplication of efforts. Identifying food systems as one of the transition pathways provides an opportunity for catalysing adequate investment in agricultural transformation to support the eradication of food

¹¹ Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly, endorsed by the Assembly in its resolution 78/1.

¹² For more information, see www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/king-letsie-iii-lesotho-launches-position-paper-integrating-nutrition-climate-financing-66946.

¹³ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, “Six transitions: investment pathways to deliver the SDGs”, September 2023.

insecurity and malnutrition. Most African countries have developed national pathways for food systems transformation and have made significant progress in their implementation.

4. Leveraging regional initiatives and pathways

22. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme continues to create momentum to push African countries to consider agricultural transformation as a driver of sustained and inclusive economic growth. Presenting the results of the biennial review of the Programme to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union offers an opportunity to advance national agrifood systems transformation. In addition, the common African position on food systems not only sustains the momentum for a renewed commitment to agricultural transformation but also provides a framework for addressing food system transformation, taking into consideration the continent's unique situation. The United Nations Food Systems Summit, held in 2021, presented an opportunity to apply a systemic approach to addressing the existing structural challenges in the agriculture sector as a follow-up to the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods.

IV. Recommendations

A. Unleash the power of policies, regulations and institutions

23. Since they shape action through incentives and disincentives, policies and regulations can be considered as the best tools for Governments to leverage behaviours, decisions and action towards achieving their food and nutrition security goals. Addressing the policy, regulatory and institutional caveats around each relevant transition pathway can be used as an entry point to influence decisions and spur commitment to action on Sustainable Development Goal 2 and the relevant goals of Agenda 2063. There is a need for policies and regulations that foster a human rights-based approach to food systems, with a view to addressing the fundamental issues of inequality, accountability and governance in food systems. It is important to focus more on practical action during the years remaining to 2030 by overhauling governance mechanisms relating to the Goals. This requires ushering in more dynamic action at the institutional level in a coordinated and more accountable manner.

B. Scale up physical and digital infrastructure

24. Policies and institutions need to be accompanied by infrastructure to enhance private sector investment, spur economic growth and create employment opportunities. Both physical infrastructure (such as roads, irrigation, electricity, telecommunication, schools and health-care facilities) and digital infrastructure (such as mobile connectivity) can improve mobility, connectivity, knowledge, skills and health, thereby enhancing efficiency, productivity and competitiveness in unprecedented ways. When such developments are applied to the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, they lead to poverty reduction and food and nutrition security through employment creation, linkages between farmers and supplier and consumer markets, and related multiplier effects. Of particular importance is the development of infrastructure for reducing post-harvest loss, expanding irrigation, facilitating access to markets and establishing agro-industrial platforms, with a specific focus on rural youth and female agrifood processors.

C. Build resilience to climate shocks

25. Preparedness to counteract shocks safeguards against the possibility of being diverted from development paths. As recurring climate-related shocks converge with economic and conflict-driven disruptions, posing disproportionate challenges for food and nutrition security, building the continent's resilience to shocks and the long-term impact of climate change becomes imperative. This includes establishing social protection programmes and anticipatory mechanisms that enable timely and adequate response to crises and emergencies, as well as taking immediate and rights-based steps to ensure access by all to sufficient, safe, adequate and nutritious food (A/HRC/53/47). Furthermore, harnessing the roles of science and technology while pursuing climate change adaptation and mitigation by adopting a green growth agenda reinforces resilience amid escalating climate-induced challenges. Food and nutrition security needs to be more prominently reflected in climate financing streams. In this regard, opportunities emerging from the Africa Climate Summit, the Sustainable Development Goals Summit and the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change are encouraging, as they open space for countries to embark upon bold strategies aimed at climate change adaptation and mitigation through building resilience to shocks.

D. Mobilize adequate financing

26. African Governments need to mobilize adequate financing for food and nutrition security, including to support infrastructure development and service delivery, climate resilience and shock preparedness. It is important that African countries aggressively push for financial resources from traditional and emerging external sources, in addition to pushing for greater domestic resource mobilization. Given the continent's disproportionate vulnerability to climate change, it is paramount to leverage global support for climate financing with a view to achieving food and nutrition security. In this regard, efforts need to be increased to capitalize on emerging and innovative financing mechanisms for climate adaptation and mitigation, such as the Global Environment Facility, the Green Climate Fund, green and blue bonds programmes, the loss and damage fund, debt-for-nature swaps, carbon pricing and carbon markets. Strengthening a common African position is essential to ensure that financial pledges for climate change adaptation and mitigation and other purposes are realized. The development outcomes from such financing mechanisms would be significant, especially if complemented with negotiations and arrangements to provide relief to countries currently facing debt crises. The role of development partners is also indispensable, not only to provide humanitarian assistance but also to invest in the continent's agricultural transformation and long-term food and nutrition security.

27. Investment in agricultural transformation includes supporting the implementation of national agriculture investment plans, in particular by: (a) prioritizing irrigation, rural infrastructure, research and development and farmer support programmes; (b) prioritizing investment in nutrient-dense first foods and supplements for children, especially the most vulnerable children living in food poverty; (c) investing in the informal sector; (d) putting innovation and technology in the hands of African women and young people; and (e) establishing home-grown school feeding programmes.

28. All these investments require new and innovative financing sources and mechanisms, including private-public partnerships, debt swaps, additional allocation of special drawing rights to Africa and domestic resource mobilization, including through capital markets. It is important to encourage an Africa-owned strategy for financing food system transformation. Such

transformation is vital, and lessons should be drawn from the energy and climate finance community regarding asset class development, de-risking instruments, donor engagement and options for domestic resource mobilization. Furthermore, changing the perception of risk in Africa is crucial, and emphasis should be placed on the need to de-risk investment in agricultural projects through cost-effective instruments.

E. Enhance data-related capacity and infrastructure

29. It is necessary to invest in data-related capacity and infrastructure development to make it possible to collect, manage, analyse, validate, communicate and use high-quality data and information on the Sustainable Development Goal indicators for food and nutrition in a timely and disaggregated manner. Such a commitment should also embrace initiatives to develop a strong coordination and communication mechanism for sharing data and exchanging information, with a view to informing decision-making at the national, regional and global levels. Moreover, it would be beneficial to take advantage of metadata structures, for which sophisticated and innovative methods, tools and approaches can be used to collect, compile, analyse and communicate metadata on the indicators. Innovative digital solutions could help to address some (if not all) of the data-related problems in tracking progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2 in Africa, provided that the challenges faced by the continent in terms of underdeveloped human capacity and physical infrastructure are addressed.

F. Seize opportunities emerging from technology, innovation, regional integration and partnerships

30. As the global landscape for conducting business is changing fast, underpinned by new technologies and innovative solutions, Africa needs to embrace a more dynamic approach to claim its place in the global economy. Digital technologies and innovative approaches can contribute to this effort by modernizing financial flows, information exchange, soil fertility mapping and land mapping for investment, thereby reducing transaction costs and risks and creating platforms that enable young people to be engaged in business. Furthermore, digital technologies and innovative solutions contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals by making the task of monitoring progress easier and more robust. Global and regional partnerships offer additional opportunities to voice concerns and coordinate action.

31. African countries can benefit from the opportunities presented through the African Continental Free Trade Area. By fast-tracking the remaining protocols and fully implementing the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, African Governments can significantly improve access to food and reduce the cost of food through shorter supply chains and reduced logistical costs. However, there is a need to streamline and harmonize regulations and payment systems to fully leverage such opportunities.

G. Secure political commitment and national leadership

32. Political commitment at the highest level of government is critical to improving food and nutrition security through the alignment of budgeting processes with the 2030 Agenda and the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods, based on: (a) evidence-based, well-designed national investment plans; (b) an enabling policy environment; and (c) long-term action across multiple systems, namely, food, health, water and sanitation, education and

social protection. Guaranteeing national leadership is critical for advancing the food security agenda. This involves putting in place strong governance mechanisms in the relevant systems and formulating evidence-based policies and strategies that enhance institutional capacity. These efforts are crucial for accelerating the transformation towards food and nutrition systems that promote environmental sustainability, human health and human capital development, social equality and economic prosperity. Policy options anchored in human rights help Governments to navigate difficult trade-offs when pressured to adopt austerity measures in the face of debt crises.

H. Unleash the power of smallholder farmers

33. The continent's over-reliance on smallholder farmers to feed its growing population cannot be overstated, and yet the risks these farmers face daily are not matched by the financial, technical and technological support that they need to thrive.¹⁴ Political commitment at the highest level of government is crucial to unlock the potential of smallholder farmers in rural Africa to overcome the challenges of hunger and poverty. Tailoring financial, technical, investment and technological solutions specifically for smallholder farmers can revolutionize farming practices and help to reshape their perceptions of the role of agriculture. Including smallholder farmers in the development of policy, investment, finance, science, technology and innovation would ensure that the interventions deployed do not leave behind the very people who need such interventions the most. This approach calls for a comprehensive and collaborative effort to empower smallholder farmers, one that recognizes their pivotal role in addressing food security and poverty challenges on the continent.

V. Lay the groundwork for agricultural transformation from within

34. The evidence that Africa is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 indicates that the development paths pursued (or the implementation processes followed) so far have not yielded sufficient results. It also serves as a reminder that the continent needs to act differently to fast-track progress towards achieving the Goals during the years that remain. Africa needs to build on existing success stories, including by: (a) implementing and continuously refining policies and institutions to create a business and public service environment conducive to the realization of the right to food for all; (b) investing in infrastructure development; (c) building resilience to shocks, including the long-term effects of climate change, and adopting sustainable farming practices; (d) tapping into opportunities unleashed by technological advancement, innovative solutions and partnerships; (e) adopting a holistic, multisectoral approach to advancing agrifood system transformation and the other five transitions that are required to ensure food and nutrition security for all; and (f) boosting enablers within the African context, including securing land rights, women's empowerment, agricultural mechanization, implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, agri-entrepreneurship, regional value chains and agro-industrialization through agro-parks.

¹⁴ Jai Shroff, "Why smallholder farmers are central to new food security interventions", World Economic Forum, 28 September 2022.