

UN Food Systems Summit Science Days – Side event

5 July 2021

Malabo Montpellier Forum --- *Connecting the dots: Policy innovations for food systems transformation in Africa*

In collaboration with the Malabo Montpellier Panel, The Rockefeller Foundation, UNFSS Scientific Group and the African Union Commission's Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Development

1. **Please detail the focus of your Dialogue. For example, it could be (i) a comprehensive exploration of food systems, (ii) an exploration of one of the five Action Tracks or levers of change of the Summit, (iii) examination of links between one or more of the Action Tracks and levers of change, (iv) or another specific theme. Describe in under 4,200 characters including spaces.**

The Malabo Montpellier (MaMo) Forum provides a platform for informed dialogue and exchange among African decision-makers at the highest-level on agriculture, nutrition food security. The 8th meeting of the MaMo Forum which took place on 5th July 2021 (online), was co-hosted by the Malabo Montpellier Panel, the UNFSS Scientific Group, and the African Union Commission's Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, the Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment. The MaMo Forum brought together over 150 participants from across the African continent and beyond, including senior representatives from national governments, academia, civil society, development partners and the private sector.

The Malabo Montpellier Panel identifies areas of progress and positive change across Africa and assesses what successful countries have done differently in terms of institutional and policy innovations and program interventions. The basis of the Forum was the Panel's latest report on food systems transformation in Africa, titled: [Connecting the Dots: Policy innovations for food systems transformation in Africa](#). The report presents a collation of African perspectives and priorities on food systems and their transformation. It provides a technical overview that summarizes the current status of food systems in Africa, linking them to policy areas that need to be prioritized to enhance and transform African food systems. The report also provides an analysis of four African countries that are leaders within their regions in adopting a more holistic approach to food systems transformation. These four countries: **Ghana, Malawi, Morocco, and Rwanda** have a particular focus on the lessons to be learned from government action: policy and institutional innovations and programmatic interventions on the ground – that can be scaled up and scaled out across the continent.

Within the context of Africa, the discussions and the report contribute towards a comprehensive exploration of food systems, an exploration of all of the five Action Tracks or

levers of change of the Summit, and an examination of links between one or more of the Action Tracks and levers of change.

Key messages from the report and case studies:

- Over the last few years, multiple and persistent shocks have hindered the potential progress in transforming Africa’s food systems. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the pinch points in Africa’s food and agricultural sectors. Disrupted supply chains, job losses (especially informal employment and jobs in urban areas), rising food prices, and a reversal in dietary diversity have all severely undermined recent development gains.
- Business as usual is no longer an option, neither in how we understand the sectors nor in how we recover from this systemic shock. “Building back better” after COVID-19 does not only mean that we need to embrace a food systems approach to policy design and implementation. In fact, food systems thinking needs to be at the heart of any future continental and global strategies for economic growth, food security, climate, and development.
- Given the inherent complexity of food systems, policy approaches are more likely to be effective if they are not compartmentalized. Rather, policy-making for food security and nutrition must move beyond agriculture and food production where it can better manage trade-offs and leverage synergies. Importantly, an environment conducive to innovation will allow for the development of creative and original policy and technical solutions by a wide range of stakeholders. Combining innovation with learning will support enhanced policy-making over the long term. Meanwhile, advocating for additional, complementary indicators within the CAADP process will ensure that the momentum arising from the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021 continues.

The MaMo Forum called upon policymakers on the African continent to rethink and reorient African food systems, and offered the following recommendations from the report:

- Ensure multi stakeholder and multi sectoral coordination across government departments in order to reflect the interconnectedness of food systems transformation.
- Facilitate evidence-based and guided experimentation and innovation of policies, and accelerated science capacity for technical solutions supporting broad food systems change.
- Institutionalize monitoring, evaluation and learning for impactful planning and implementation
- Integrate food systems transformation into long-term national vision, growth and development agendas
- Enhance CAADP indicators to reflect the complexity of food systems.

- 2. Please share your appreciation of the main findings (or conclusions) that emerged from your Dialogue. For example, your key findings might detail a) the need to establish new connections between certain stakeholders, b) an**

agreement on actions that stakeholders will take together (expressed as intentions or commitments), c) a decision to explore specific aspects of food systems in greater depth. Describe in under 5,600 characters including spaces

Participants at the 8th MaMo Forum were invited to comment on the key findings from the report and explore the potential for replicating and scaling up successes identified in the case study countries.

Speakers agreed that Africa's food systems must tackle several structural changes including population growth, young population, rapid urbanization, a growing middle class combined with steady income growth, and the transition to a digital economy. At the same time, climate change, health pandemics and conflicts are making access to food unsustainable. Over the last three years, large social and environmental shocks including the Fall Army Worm infestation, the desert locust infestation and the COVID19 pandemic as well as extreme weather events have severely strained Africa's agricultural sector. In fact, the pandemic has simply aggravated the situation and exposed the weaknesses in the wider food system. In other parts of the world, food systems currently result in negative health outcomes and destroy economic value rather than contribute positively. It is clear that the food and agriculture sectors affect and are affected by several other aspects of social and economic organization. ***Addressing the challenges that affect the food system can therefore no longer be addressed in a silo.***

It is now widely recognized that food systems must be transformed to better serve people, food and environment. A food systems transformation is at the heart of delivering enough, safe and healthy diets for all. Without a significant effort to transform our food systems we are likely to continue seeing pandemics and undermine progress in achieving global goals. In Africa, it is even more urgent and more pressing to transform food systems; yet the process of transformation offers exciting opportunities. Yet, there was a general agreement that this process is likely to be complex and difficult.

a. It is difficult!

Participants at the 8th MaMo Forum agreed that a food systems transformation is not going to be easy. It is extremely unnatural to think in systemic ways; it is also extremely political and technical. Rather than be overwhelmed by the complexity though, policymakers will benefit from keeping their ambitions realistic. A systemic approach to food systems is likely to draw out win-wins. Where there are trade-offs, dialogue will be necessary – and one that is both inclusive and broad.

b. Coordination and collaboration: multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral engagement and inclusion:

Participants repeatedly ***emphasized the importance of coordination across ministries and policy interventions.*** For instance, in Malawi, a government structure convenes players from the Ministry of Agriculture & other ministries. This committee of Permanent Secretaries is the key avenue for coordination of government interventions and policy. In addition, there are several sector working groups which draw from public, private, non-state and development

partners. Through these platforms, policymakers identify the key national priorities for agricultural development and monitor their implementation. Implementation is also reviewed through a participatory joint sector process. Beyond the national agricultural policy, frameworks for specific sub sectors are also formulated in a collaborative manner, all of which help to implement national agricultural policy.

However, sustaining coordination requires support. Although Uganda made efforts to transform its agriculture in 1998 through multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral coordination, the process eventually ran out of steam. It is therefore essential to institutionalize coordination which in turn ensures that the required support is available. In addition, it is essential to share best practice and new knowledge on how best to continue coordination at scale.

c. Adapting existing institutions and frameworks for food systems transformation.

Africa will have to create its own food system. Moving forward on systematic transformation will need co-creation rather than conscription; it will also require humility and build on existing structures and embrace evidence and innovation.

During the discussions at the 8th MaMo Forum, it became clear that policymakers and governments are using various avenues to form the basis for engaging a broad range of stakeholders relevant to a food systems and agricultural transformation. For example, South Africa is currently undergoing a process to update its national agricultural masterplan. An elaborate consultation is taking place to contribute towards its development; the plan is driving engagement between various stakeholders including the government, private sector, civil society and development partners. In addition, the new masterplan will reflect the outcomes from national consultations around food systems. It is expected that the new plan will act as an investment plan to crowd in private capital. It will also be an opportunity to review and address the legislative gaps across South Africa's food systems, thereby creating confidence for businesses and investors.

In Sierra Leone and Ghana, countries are adapting their Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) platform to convene and coordinate stakeholders for inputs on food systems.

d. Transcending political cycles and changes:

A food systems transformation is a long-term and iterative process. The MaMo report highlights the need for a food systems transformation to transcend political cycles. In this respect, participants highlighted the role of long-term development plans in ensuring that the process of transformation supersedes short term political changes and provides the policy consistency that is much required for investments. Participants also discussed the efforts currently taking place to enshrine into law a requirement to align political campaigning manifestos with long term development plans. This option is being discussed in Ghana and Malawi. In Ghana, a national planning law transcends political divides. The national long-term development policy is broken into medium term plans. While political manifestos become blueprints for government, they are legally required to align with long term development plans. The National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) operationalizes long term plans into medium term plans and integrates political flagships thereby ensuring that all critical going

concerns are loaded onto medium term plans. Where political priorities do not sufficiently intersect with long term policy frameworks, advocacy is needed.

In Sierra Leone too, the National Sustainable Agriculture Development Plan is implemented for a period of 20 years and any incoming government must align their ambitions and manifesto with it. The Plan demands consistency to achieve its goals.

Given the importance of agriculture in Malawi's economy, successive governments have been obliged to commit to investing in the sector. Malawi's recently released Agenda 2063 names agriculture within one of its top three priorities with the other two priorities also affecting and affected by agriculture. Since there was a very rich engagement process to create the Agenda 2063, the country is currently considering a law that requires political campaigning between now and 2063 to align with priorities set out in the long-term national development plan.

- 3. Please share the areas of divergence that emerged during your Dialogue. An area of divergence is an issue where participants held diverse views, different opinions and/or opposing positions. For example, this might be related to a) strengths and vulnerabilities within food systems, b) areas that need further exploration, c) practices that are needed for food system sustainability, d) stakeholders whose interests should be prioritized. Note: Please do not attribute any views to named individuals. Describe in under 5,600 characters including spaces**

- a. Frameworks for driving food systems transformation:

Agenda 2063, Agenda 2030 and other intergovernmental frameworks provide a powerful political basis to address Africa's future. Similarly, the CAADP process including investment plans have been a success in building policy consistency for agricultural growth and development in Africa. Yet the impact of these frameworks is waning as fewer African countries meet the targets set out by the Malabo Declaration. A food systems transformation requires more complex and systemic approach. Science and innovation must form the foundation for policy-led transformation. Participants at the 8th MaMo Forum debated whether a food systems transformation can be founded upon a revival of commitments to the process; with greater education, training and advocacy as well as improved communications and enhanced partnerships with think tanks, policymakers and research institutions; or whether a new process or new indicators are required. This recommendation from the MaMo Panel's report certainly requires further exploration.

Conclusion:

The complex challenges presented by food systems transformation will require complex solutions involving multiple sectors, industries, and stakeholders, all of whom arrive with varying interests. In other words, policy-making for food security and nutrition must move beyond agriculture and food production where it can better manage trade-offs and leverage synergies.

Certain African countries have—despite significant pressures—fared better than others in managing their food security and nutrition outcomes. Key lessons can be drawn from their experience and from the visionary approach they have taken to food systems transformation. Although not explicitly, a number of countries have already been adopting a holistic approach to transforming their food systems.

As policymakers look to the future, key lessons must be drawn from the experience of the last few years and other countries; governments must reorient future trajectories so as to “build back better” and plan for beyond 2030. Importantly, policies which integrate multiple objectives must be prioritized, including those that call for a healthy and safe diet for all, decent incomes for farmers and food system workers, and minimum environmental harm. Policymakers will have an opportunity to leverage the existing strengths of their national circumstances

While 2021 will mark a turning point and an important milestone in the transformation of Africa’s food systems, the momentum must be maintained well beyond the UN Food Systems Summit in order to ensure follow through on the commitments and targets that are being set and on stakeholders’ shared ambitions.