

# Building Inclusive National Food Systems: Considerations for the UN Food Systems Summit

*National Level Led Consultations*

**Prof. Adipala Ekwamu, Executive Secretary, RUFORUM**

## **Background**

The Africa agriculture report 2020 by AGRA communicates a unique development in the continent's food systems and agricultural markets. The report provides evidence to the effect that the cities in the continent currently provide the largest and most rapidly growing agricultural markets with roughly US\$200 to US\$250 billion food sales per year being undertaken within African cities and over 80% of this food comes from domestic African suppliers. African urbanisation is projected to peak rapidly making the continent one of the most urbanizing region of the world thereby offering the largest and fastest growing agricultural markets to the 60 million farms in the continent<sup>1</sup>.

National food systems of low and middle-income countries within the continent are evolving, being rapidly shaped and transformed. There are essentially four different typologies of food systems closely related to the development process taking place in most of the countries in the global south, Africa inclusive. Firstly, the traditional food system, characterized by a dominance of traditional, unorganized supply chains and limited market infrastructure. Secondly, the more structured food system, still characterized by traditional market actors, but with a more complex set of rules and regulations applied to marketplaces and a higher degree of market infrastructure. Thirdly, the industrialized food system, as found throughout the developed world, with strong perceptions of food safety, a high degree of coordination, a large and consolidated processing sector and organized retailers; this is one which many smallholder farmers are unable to meet their conditions and remain excluded from gains in it. Fourth, the alternative food system, where farmers, various types of intermediaries and consumers are able to construct semi-closed circuits of exchange that are often based on values stressing transactional processes of trust, community, social and environmental welfare against capitalist transaction outcomes of exchange<sup>2</sup>. Owing to the various levels of growth and development in the continent, the transitions of these four systems is complex but dramatically changing.

The transformation of national food systems in low and middle-income countries is part of the larger story of rural transformation, urbanization, and development that offers new opportunities for inclusion of poor and marginalized people. In addition to creating employment and income-generating opportunities, the transformation that is currently being witnessed

---

<sup>1</sup> AGRA 2020. Africa Agriculture Report, Nairobi-Kenya.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Rye Kledal, 2009. The four food systems in developing countries and the challenges of modern supply chain inclusion for organic small-holders. [chrome-extension://oemmndcbldboiebfnladdacbfmadadm/https://orgprints.org/id/eprint/18553/1/18553.pdf](https://orgprints.org/id/eprint/18553/1/18553.pdf)

provides opportunity to support improvements in nutrition that are associated with long-term impacts on health, cognitive capacity, educational attainment, income, and development. These developments are largely being shaped by the urbanisation and rise in incomes, and changes in consumer's behavior.

Changes in food demand can drive changes throughout a food system, ranging from farmers to supply chains, markets, and households. Yet poverty especially among the rural households primarily smallholder farmers, geographic isolation, gender, and other inequalities can exclude people from new opportunities created by national food system transformations and can make healthy food difficult to access. These failures are evident in several countries in a range of indicators; disappointingly slow reductions in rates of child stunting, persistent hunger, high prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies, and rapidly increasing rates of overweight and obesity<sup>3</sup>. Developing inclusive food systems that provide opportunity for equitable opportunities gain requires a thorough understanding of how the food systems function, what entry points and policies are most effective, and what trade-offs must be made, and what governance arrangements exist in the current food systems including the urban food systems among other considerations.

#### **United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021<sup>4</sup>**

The United Nations is under advanced stages in convening the 2021 Food Systems Summit as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The Summit will launch bold new actions to deliver progress on all 17 SDGs, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems. The Summit will awaken the world to the fact that we all must work together to transform the way the world produces, and consumes thinks about food. And importantly, develop resilience to the vagaries associated with climate change and natural resource degradation. It is a Summit for everyone everywhere: a people's Summit. It is also a solutions Summit that will require everyone to take action to transform the world's food systems.

The Summit brings together key players from the worlds of science, business, policy, healthcare and academia, as well as farmers, indigenous people, youth organizations, consumer groups, environmental activists, and other key stakeholders. Before, during and after the Summit, these actors will come together to agree on key actions to bring about tangible, positive changes to the world's food systems.

The 2021 UN Food Systems Summit seeks to deliver the following outcomes:

1. Generate significant action and measurable progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by identifying solutions and leaders, and issuing a call for action

---

<sup>3</sup> IFPRI, 2020. National food systems: Inclusive transformation for healthier diets. <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/national-food-systems-inclusive-transformation-healthier-diets>

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from the Food Systems Summit website: <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/about>

at all levels of the food system, including national and local governments, companies and citizens.

2. Raise awareness and elevate public discussion about how reforming our food systems can help us all to achieve the SDGs by implementing reforms that are good for people and planet.
3. Develop principles to guide governments and other stakeholders looking to leverage their food systems to support the SDGs. These principles will set an optimistic and encouraging vision in which food systems play a central role in building a fairer, more sustainable world. Principles of engagement
4. Create a system of follow-up and review to ensure that the Summit's outcomes continue to drive new actions and progress. This system will allow for the sharing of experiences, lessons and knowledge; it will also measure and analyse the Summit's impact.

### **National Level Led Consultations**

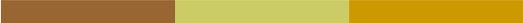
The 2021 UN Food Systems Summit is an opportunity for national and local governments, actors and stakeholders to take stock of progress in the realisation of inclusive food systems. There is now credible evidence that food systems are undergoing rapid transformation across the spectrum from traditional to modern and consequently, there is need for government policy goals to shift from a focus on food security to healthy, and balanced diets. But, achieving this shift is not just a walk in the sun, national food system frameworks are required to guide the analysis of drivers and components of the systems, identifying data gaps, and finding promising entry points for actions to increase inclusion, improve nutrition outcomes as well as poverty reduction outcomes within the food system. The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), a consortium of 129 African universities from 38 countries, through Prof. Adipala Ekwamu as one of the Food Systems Champions, is mobilizing African Universities to take leadership in National Dialogues to shape the food systems agenda at national and continental level. The National level led consultations seeks to contribute to the domestication of the four UN Food Systems Outcomes at country level.

### **Mode of National Consultation**

- Virtual

### **Participants**

- Country Dependent



## **Needed Action**

African Universities to link with National Governments and other actors to convene dialogue events to generate key messages and recommendations from National perspectives

African universities and National focal persons to share their reports with, among others: Prof Adipala Ekwamu at [e.adipala@ruforum.org](mailto:e.adipala@ruforum.org) with copies to [secretariat@ruforum.org](mailto:secretariat@ruforum.org); [f.nakayiwa@ruforum.org](mailto:f.nakayiwa@ruforum.org); and [a.mweetwa@ruforum.org](mailto:a.mweetwa@ruforum.org)

***06 April 2021***