

RUFORUM Webinar Series (2020)

Introductory Note for Webinar 6

Date: 31 July 2020

Time: 14.00-16.30 East African Standard Time

Universities and Research Institutions Supporting Family Farmers During and Post COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa

Background

Family farmers rely on family labour for production and other farm operations and produce almost 80% of the world's food in value terms. They dominate the agriculture sector in Africa, feeding and employing two thirds of the population and are central to a sustainable future for agriculture, eradicating hunger and poverty, achieving social cohesion, employment and sustainable use of natural resources. Their potential to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aspirations in the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) on the continent is huge. Yet their efforts are limited by several challenges and vulnerability to risks and shocks. Family farmers mostly rely on traditional modes of farming with very little use of machinery, lack access to improved crop varieties, fertilizers, irrigation, and financial services to enable them to invest in modernising and intensifying their farming practices. Furthermore, they face limited access to agricultural and other innovations in the sector, which are essential in enhancing productivity, as well as coping with some of the anticipated challenges in the post COVID-19 pandemic era.

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting on family farmers' ability to access agricultural services, to work on their farms, and to access markets. Lockdowns to restrict people's movement and materials, curfews, quarantine and social distancing measures put in place by Governments to limit the spread of the coronavirus, have disrupted local food systems in many African countries. Provision of agricultural services and transportation of farm produce have been affected, labour intensive processing of farm produce has slowed down if not stopped, markets have temporarily closed, and family farmers are unable to sale their produce, especially perishable products, resulting in suffering significant losses. The COVID-19 control measures have in some countries also affected the activities to control the fall armyworm (FAW) and desert locusts, thus exacerbating the threat to food security and livelihoods of millions of family farmers on the continent. The uncertainty of farming activities in Africa is worrying for family farmers and will curtail attaining CAADP goals and targets.

In Africa, strong support to family farmers is essential to enable them to respond to current shocks, build their resilience to manage current and future uncertainty, and contribute to



attainment of the SDGs and delivering on CAADP. This calls for strong partnerships and coordination among government agencies, farmer organizations, international and regional development agencies, universities and research institutions.

Universities and research institutions, as a major components of national innovation systems, are in a good position to develop capacities of family famers and contribute to local solutions to address the current and post COVID-19 impact on family farmers. However, the support should respond to the real needs of family farmers and should complement initiatives being undertaken by national governments and development partner to support family farmers.

Objective

This webinar brings together representatives of universities, family farmers organizations, development partners, agricultural research institutions, and government agencies to chat a way forward for universities in Africa to contribute to enhancing the livelihoods of family farmers and developing their capacities to cope with increasing uncertainty caused by current shocks. In particular, the webinar will aim to address universities' and research institutions' roles in: (i) promoting rural communities' initiatives, and development and transfer of technologies; (ii) harmonization of regional policies and strategies to support family farmers; and (iii) strategies to reinforce the capacity and resilience of family farmers, especially women and youth, and their organizations to cope with shocks.

Mode of Delivery

The webinar will be delivered through the Zoom video and audio-conferencing platform. Interested participants must register to attend the webinar through the [link](#).

Organisers

The Partnerships Division of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is collaborating with the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) are jointly organizing the webinar. FAO and RUFORUM entered into a formal partnership in 2017 and currently are supporting initiatives to build capacities of young family farmers in Eastern and Southern Africa to improve their access to and sharing of agricultural innovations.

Targeted audiences

Representatives of Africa Union Commission, universities, agricultural research organizations, government agencies, international, regional and national development partners agencies supporting family farmers in Africa.



Panelists

1. **Ms. Beth Bechdol**, Deputy Director General, FAO, Rome-Italy
2. **H.E. Sacko Josefa Leonel Correa**, Commissioner, Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union Commission (AUC), Addis Ababa-Ethiopia
3. **Hon. Michael Katambo**, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Lusaka-Zambia
4. **DR. Stephen Muchiri**, Chief Executive Officer, Eastern Africa Farmers Federation, Nairobi-Kenya
5. **Dr. Vuyo Mahlali**, President, African Farmers Association of South Africa, Pretoria-South Africa
6. **Dr. Abdou Tenkouano**, Executive Director, CORAF, Dakar-Senegal

Lead Presenter: Dr. Marcela Villarreal, Director, PSU Division, FAO, Rome-Italy

Discussant: Prof Brice Sinsin, Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Abomey Calavi, Cotonou-Benin

Moderator: Prof. Abebe Haile-Gabriel, Assistant Director-General, FAO, Accra-Ghana

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