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## AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

# Building Resilience in Food Systems and Agricultural Value Chains: Agricultural Policy Responses to COVID-19 in Africa

G-CoP

SPM  
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Summary for Policymakers - B&M



## COORDINATING LEAD AUTHORS

### Kevin Chika Urama

Senior Director, African Development Institute,  
African Development Bank Group

### Eric Kehinde Ogunleye

Advisor to the Chief Economist and Vice President,  
Economic Governance and Knowledge Management/OIC  
Manager, Policy Management Division, African Development  
Institute, African Development Bank Group

## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

### Atsuko Toda

Director, Agricultural Finance and Rural Development,  
African Development Bank Group

### Nkoanyane Sebutsoe

Senior Capacity Development Officer, African Development Institute

### Njeri Wabiri

Consultant, African Development Institute

### Kwadwo Nyantakyi

Consultant, African Development Institute

## PEER REVIEW EDITORS

Professor David Morrison, Deputy Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation, Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia; Professor Anthonia Ifeyinwa Achike, Professor of Agricultural Economics and Director, Gender and Development Policy Centre (GEN-CENT), University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Adjunct Faculty member of the Trade Policy Training Centre in Africa (TRAPCA), Arusha-Tanzania, Nigeria; Professor David Doepel, Former Deputy Vice Chancellor-Research and Innovation, Murdoch University / Chair Africa-Australia Research Forum, Perth, Western Australia; Dr. Éliane Ubaliyoro, Deputy Executive Director for Programs, Global Open Data in Agriculture (GODAN), Canada; Mr. Mohamed Boussaid, Former Minister of Finance, Morocco; Professor Akpan Hogan Ekpo, FNES, Professor of Economics and Public Policy Department of Economics, University of Uyo, Nigeria; Professor Paul Teng, Managing Director, NIE International Pte. Ltd., Adjunct Senior Fellow, Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore; Dr. Shadrack Moephuli, President and Chief Executive Officer, Agricultural Research Council (ARC), South Africa; Dr Abebe Haile-Gabriel, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Africa, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy; Professor Camilla Toulmin, Senior Associate, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), University of Oxford, Institute for New Economic Thinking (INET), United Kingdom; Professor Frank Place, Director of Policies, Institutions and Markets, CGIAR Research Program, United States of America; Professor Dr Christoph Kohlmeyer, Senior Advisor to the President, African Development Bank.

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Nnadozie, Executive Secretary, African Capacity Building Foundation (Zimbabwe); Professor Rashid Sumaila, Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, Fisheries Economics Research Unit, Canada Research Chair (Tier I, Interdisciplinary Ocean and Fisheries Economics) (Canada); Professor James Thurlow, Senior Research Fellow, The International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington (USA); Professor Wisdom Akpalu, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) (Ghana); Dr. Michele Leone, Senior Program Specialist, Agriculture and Environment, International Development Research Centre, Regional Office for Central and West Africa, Dakar (Senegal); Madhur Gautam, Lead Agriculture Economist, Head of Global Food Security Team, The World Bank (USA); Dr. Lennart Olsson, Professor of Geography /Founder Director, Lucsus Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies Lund (Sweden); Professor Jeremy Nicholson, Director of the Australian National Phenome Centre, Pro Vice Chancellor for the Health Future Institute at Murdoch University (Australia); Dr. Éliane Ubalijoro, Deputy Executive Director for Programs at Global Open Data in Agriculture (GODAN) (Rwanda); Dr Erick Fernandes, Lead Agriculture Specialist, Head of AgObservatory, The World Bank (USA); Mr. Christensen Colin, Global Policy Director One Acre Fund, Washington, DC (USA); Mr. Jonathan Said, Head of Practices and Inclusive Growth, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, London (UK); Professor Thomas Reardon, Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics, Michigan State University (USA); Professor Ifeyinwa Achike, Professor of Agric Economics & Director Centre for Gender Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka (Nigeria); Dr. Molina Cruz Javier, Leader of the Land Tenure Unit, Partnership Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome (Italy); Dr. Jonathan Munguti, Head, Aquaculture Division, Kenya Marine & Fisheries Research Institute (Kenya); Professor Elaine Holmes, Premier's Fellow Australian National Phenome Centre Murdoch University, and Fellow of the UK Academy of Medical Sciences (Australia); Ms. Umoru Mosunmola, Founder, Farmshoppe, Agri-Business Development, Lagos (Nigeria); Professor Sagadevan G. Mundree, Director, Centre for Agriculture, and the Bioeconomy Institute for Future Environments, Queensland University of Technology (Australia); Dr. Andrew Agyei-Holmes, Research Fellow at the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, University of Ghana (Ghana); Professor Dhanjay Jhurry, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius (Mauritius); Professor 'Sola Ajayi, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, First Technical University, Oyo State (Nigeria); Dr Lian F. Thomas, Post-Doctoral Fellow, ILRI/ University of Liverpool (Kenya); Dr Rochelle Spencer, Developmental Anthropologist, Murdoch University (Australia); Aminata Loum; Luc Christiaensen, World Bank Group; Zhang Hingzhou, Lee Kuan Yew University (Singapore); Cecilia Tortajada, Lee Kuan Yew University (Singapore); Armen Harutyunyan, Lee Kuan Yew University (Singapore); Rochelle Spencer, Murdoch University (Australia); Akeju Olagbaju, Retired Director, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Abuja (Nigeria); Sonwa Denis, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR); Sue Geoghegan, Murdoch University (Australia); Soumaila Rachid, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (Canada); Joshua Olaoye (Nigeria).

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# 01 Introduction

**T**he unexpected exogenous shocks inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy have resulted in precipitated varying global, regional, and national policy responses. To contain the spread of the virus and mitigate its widespread impacts, countries have responded by adopting unprecedented policy measures reflecting a mixture of scientific advice and political considerations. The precise mixtures of which appear to reflect deep-seated cultural preferences and tolerance for individuality and perceptions of personal rights versus collective responsibility. Other contextual factors include national capacities, capabilities and reach as well as environmental circumstances. The adopted policy measures are largely two-pronged. The first set of policies – the ‘short term’ – focuses on an immediate response aimed strategies to flatten the infection curve through therapeutic and non-therapeutic prevention and containment measures – notably personal hygiene, social distancing, face masking, border closures. The consequences of which are reflected in lockdown, leading to dramatic reduction in economic activity for some countries to various degrees. The second set of policies takes the form of eased monetary and fiscal adjustments policies as well as social safety nets targeted at helping citizens, businesses and public institutions to cope with reduction in economic exchanges. Additionally, some countries have implemented export restrictions of staples to conserve their own food stocks while others have also taken anticipatory measures like export restriction.

**Due to existing vulnerabilities, Africa is likely to be severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic within various ramifications that include food availability and supply chain food security generally.**

The unprecedented and sudden impacts of COVID-19 on global value chains and food supply systems expose many African countries, especially those that are reliant on food importation to feed their citizens, to greater risks of mortality than those created by just the health risks of COVID-19 infection. Added to this are challenges associated with imports of agricultural inputs as well as the collapse of the international markets for agricultural output such as horticulture markets. Before the onslaught of COVID-19, malnutrition, hunger and starvation were silent pandemics that kill hundreds of thousands



of Africans annually. For instance, 237 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are adjudged chronically undernourished, while 257 million Africa people (20 percent of the population) are experiencing hunger. Furthermore, by early 2020, prior to the pandemic 135 million people were experiencing hunger so severe that it threatened their lives and livelihoods<sup>1</sup>. The World Food Program estimates that with COVID-19, this number could be doubled by the end of 2020. It is estimated that about 9 million people die of hunger annually worldwide (mainly children in poorer countries).

**With the collapse of national economies and subsequent loss of jobs and income, the social distancing, lockdowns and border closures, the policies designed to flatten the COVID-19 disease curve in Africa, seem primed to kill more people than the virus itself.**

Over 70 percent of Africans depend on artisanal jobs in the informal sector where the main source of income for their daily food is physical labour. Lockdowns in the developing countries have literally shut down the only sources of income for the most vulnerable majority in African countries. Under these conditions, curve flattening policies are difficult to implement and police as many artisanal (gig economy) workers are driven to continue working in order to survive. The risk of exploitation under these conditions is evident. Even for those who have the resources to buy food in the developing world, prices

<sup>1</sup> World Food Program, 2020. Risk of Hunger Pandemic as COVID-19 set to almost double acute hunger by end of 2020, viewed 1 May 2020. <https://insight.wfp.org/cCOVID-19-will-almost-double-people-in-acute-hunger-by-end-of-2020-59df0c4a8072>

have skyrocketed for many commodities in many locations due to scarcities created by border closures, panic buying and individual as well as national hoarding of food supplies. Many times, these actions are taken as a risk-mitigating measures against uncertainties caused by COVID -19. This has resulted in artificial supply shocks which have increased staple food prices beyond the reach of many Africans who live on less than US\$2 a day. Up to 419 million additional people could fall into extreme poverty in 2020, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia<sup>2</sup>.

**The COVID-19 pandemic is a reminder of the age-old value of nations being able to feed themselves.**

Food is an essential universal need for all human beings, a right which when denied, affects all aspects of the human experience and risks the security of nations, economies and communities. It has remained a paradox that Africa – the continent that holds over 60% of the remaining arable land on earth and with more than 60% of the population engaged in Agriculture – spends over US\$135 billion of its scarce foreign exchange earnings to import food to feed its citizens. It seems highly probable that with rising prices and reduced income the knock-on effects of the COVID-19 response measures on food systems and agricultural market value chains will be inimical to many Africans.

**The state of food hunger exacerbated by the pandemic is likely to lead to hunger pandemics that may induce social unrest in many African countries, if the current lock-downs across countries persist.**

This may create longer term impacts in many countries through loss of lives of citizens, permanent physical, cognitive as well as the emotional damage for children who may survive the hunger pandemic. Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will therefore be protracted beyond its duration. Thus, there might be a vicious circle of the human cost exacerbating the economic cost. A sustained negative food export balance through societal breakdown will exert avoidable additional pressure on already limited fiscal balances for the affected countries. Without some forms of global interventions, the future is bleak for nations, communities, cultures and millions of individuals.

**African countries need support to learn from the mistakes and successes of others regarding the new knowledge products and technical expertise acquired during the pandemic.**

This will assist the continent to make prompt and better decisions in addressing the rapidly evolving pandemic, case management, and at the same time keep in view the need to build whilst creating resilience in the COVID-19 world and beyond through the implementation of effective public policy and governmental intervention, perhaps on a global scale.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, 2020. The impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Why sub-Saharan Africa might be the region hardest hit, viewed 01 May 2020. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/impact-covid--19-coronavirus-global-poverty-why-sub-saharan-africa-might-be-region-hardest>

**The African Development Institute (ADI) of the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) convened a Global Community of Practice (G-CoP) event on COVID-19 response strategies to support countries with evidence-based policy options, strategies, capacity development, and technical assistance.**

The ADI in collaboration with the World Bank Group, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the African Agricultural Economics Society (AAAS), and selected anchor institutions including Universities, Universities of Agriculture, Agricultural Policy Research Institutions and Networks convened the second G-CoP policy seminar on *Building Resilience in Food Systems and Agricultural Value Chains: Agricultural Policy Responses to COVID-19 in Africa*. The seminar that was held on 18 -and 19 May 2020, brought together 770 Experts from 57 nationalities. Key Panelists included former Ministers of Finance, former Ministers of National Planning, Former Chief Economic Adviser to a Head of State and Government, technical staff of Prime Minister's Offices, and leading Experts from multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, IFPRI, FAO, UNDP, UNECA, CGAIR, the UN, Oxfam, and World Wildlife Fund. Many leaders of Universities, think tanks, professional associations including the African Association of Agricultural Economists (AAAE), and leaders of the private sector were also represented. Delegates discussed policy options, implementation challenges as well as the remedial actions required to build resilience in food systems and agricultural value chains from short-, medium-, and long-term perspectives. The potency, applicability and multiplier effects of each policy measure in Africa's social, economic and political context were also taken into consideration.

**This policy brief summarizes the emergent key policy options from the seminar.**

It includes:

- options for short-term policy interventions required to deal with agriculture and food-related impacts of the pandemic,
- medium-term policies needed for economic rebuilding, and
- long-term policies for building more resilient and inclusive economies, and resetting reinforcing the drive towards achieving the SDGs.

The policy brief also presents a high-level summary of the potency and appropriateness of each policy option within the African contexts and suggests remedial actions to address the implementation challenges.

**The overarching goal is to equip African countries with policy options to contain the virus, recover and rebuild better economies with more focus on the quality of growth, rather and less than on the quantity of economic growth.**

The two-day conversation repeatedly highlighted that the focus of recovery should be on building economies that focuses on efficiency, sufficiency, inclusiveness, and above all resilience through sustainability for all African nations. This is the best way to enhance resilience to exogenous shocks such as COVID-19 in the Africa we want.

# 02 Policy options

The policy options available to bilateral and multilateral organizations cut across three-time horizons: short-term (prevention and containment), medium-term (reopening, rebuilding and reimagining the economies), and long-term (building resilient economies in post-COVID-19) with strong focus on public policy options. The emphasis is on, not just building back, but building back better. This note presents a summary of these policies.

## 2.1

### Short-term policies for prevention and containment

The focus of policies in the short-term is on prevention and containment measures. This involves regional-focused actions that provide support for national and global economies to do whatever it takes to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus at all costs to save lives, protect livelihoods, and thriving small and medium scale enterprises. Considering regional pre-conditions and vulnerabilities in defining and implementing prevention, and containment policies would assist countries to overcome the various challenges they face.

A summary of selected specific policy options at the regional level proffered by the panel of global experts in the short-term are:

#### 2.1.1

#### Coordinate cross-learning at regional level

Africa is confronted with limited availability of dedicated platforms for sharing experiences, expertise and knowledge on diverse issues to promote cross-learning. This is a key challenge policymakers are likely to face in their efforts to implement this policy. One potential solution is to leverage ADI's G-CoP Virtual Capacity Development Academy (VCDA) as a channel for promoting regional cross-country learning. This platform has several certified global experts in different areas and sectors that can provide tailored and focused expertise in diverse areas of need to RMCs.



## 2.1.2

### Provide regional storage mechanism to ensure easy supply of basic food

Success in implementing this policy could be moderated by lack of regional and continental frameworks for food storage, poor regional infrastructure that limits transportation of food across countries, and rigid application of Customs rules. To mitigate around these challenges, there is need to establish regional and continental food reserves (emergency, strategic and humanitarian) to serve as a third line of defense in the event of a food crisis and complement the national and local efforts. Existing sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures as well as Customs procedures need to be reviewed to allow for flexibility that would aid easy flow of food on the continent. Leveraging and building on existing initiatives like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Regional Food Security Reserve and ensuring this its replication in all regions would also help.

## 2.1.3

### Incentivize investment in agriculture and agribusinesses

There are limited initiatives to incentivize investment in agriculture, especially for youth in Africa. This emphasizes the imperatives to intensify implementation of existing region-wide agri-preneur projects such as Empowering Novel Agri-Business-Led Employment (ENABLE) Youth Program. Forging partnerships with existing youth agri-preneur initiatives such as the Tony Elumelu Foundation would also provide a quick launch pad without “reinventing the wheel”.

## 2.1.4

### Fill data and knowledge gaps by providing reliable and credible data

There is a huge data gap on the activities of input providers, urban and rural farmers, importers, aggregators, processors, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, cooks, caterers, restaurants, and food banks at national, regional, and continental levels. Information is also lacking on vulnerable populations, especially the under-5 and over 60-year-olds. Filling the huge data and information needs in key areas that could inform policy interventions and decisions would pose a great challenge to actualizing this policy. A smart approach to dealing with the huge data challenge is to begin by making good use of existing data available through relevant public and private institutions. Such available information is useful for targeting the poor and vulnerable, for weather decisions, planting seasons, etc. Added to this is the development of a framework for all actors in the food ecosystem to collaborate by sharing information across value chains and between sectors.

## 2.1.5

### Grant regional market access for food trade

This would include speeding up Customs clearance, shortening quarantine and review times, and opening green channels for agricultural products and food imports in key ports. However, the fact is that varying Customs regulations are implemented in different countries and the rigid application of sanitary and phyto-sanitary food regulations could constrain implementation. As a solution, there is urgent need to push for the commencement of implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and leveraging it to achieve needed reforms to allow for easy flow of food through an African-wide single market.

## 2.1.6

### Promote and improve safety standards – through Regional Bureaus of standards

The establishment and operationalization of continental and regional Bureaus of Standards will also help harmonize the rules and smoothen regional food trade. However, the current absence of legal, regulatory, policy and institutional structures and frameworks given the diverse frameworks in individual African countries is a real challenge. Added to this, is the obvious lack of clarity at the regional level in the interpretation of national policies. Corruption and limited compliance and sometimes non-compliance with coordination, as well as weak regulatory and legal frameworks would also hurt implementation of this policy option. To deal with these issues, there is a need to establish an African Bureau of Standards and Regional Bureaus of Standards to regulate, coordinate, harmonize and manage standards in Africa. Ensuring commensurate rewarding and punitive measures are entrenched in the coordination, regulatory and legal frameworks is critical to assure good consequence management.

## 2.1.7

### Provide technology-based solutions for food production

Some key areas would include credit platforms, digital insurance, and payment systems. However, shortage of local infrastructure and technology to drive innovations that include aerial images from satellites or drones, weather forecasts, and soil sensors would moderate reaping the full benefits of this policy option. To deal with it, there is a need to coordinate existing pockets of technology-based innovations across Africa and to make them available for use in all countries needing them. Some of these are: Zenvus in Nigeria; AgroCenta and Farmerline in Ghana; M-Farm, FarmDrive, SunCulture, and UjuziKilimo in Kenya; Centre Songhai in Benin, and AgroSpaces in Cameroon.

## 2.1.8

### Provide sustainable finance for agriculture and food production

Most African countries are characterized by long bureaucratic processes that unnecessarily lengthens the time funding is delivered to countries during emergencies. A Regional Exogenous Shocks Funds should be established with a governance structure that designates it as an emergency fund, thus allowing for flexibility and quick deployment to countries during emergencies. All bilateral and multilateral institutions providing support to Africa should make financial services to farmers a pillar of their COVID-19 crisis response.

## 2.1.9

### Coordinate response at regional and global levels to provide support for national efforts

Presently, insufficient attention is being paid to coordination efforts at regional and global levels for agriculture and food production. One possible solution is for Regional Economic Communities, the African Union, UN agencies, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and other institutions to take the lead by encouraging countries to domesticate regional initiatives at the national and local levels, including the High-5s. Global financial institutions like the World Bank and IFAD are encouraged to use the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development to coordinate global response and provide regional and country-specific support to agriculture and food production.



## 2.2

### Medium-term policies for reopening and rebuilding the economies

For the medium term, which is the recovery phase, G-CoP experts focused on rebuilding the economies and starting from now to lay the foundation for building resilience. For this phase, the following policy options were recommended.

#### 2.2.1

#### Invest in regional Special Food Processing Zones (SFPZs)

High volume of food imports from outside Africa coupled with the use of ad hoc trade and market policy interventions to manage food security risks could weaken the take-off of this initiative. This, therefore, requires developing a regional legal and regulatory framework to govern operations of regional SFPZs. Furthermore, identify border towns or cities where there is high potential for success and start from there before upscaling. Food trade rules harmonization through promoting implementation of food facilitation protocols that are already in existence would also give impetus to successful implementation.

#### 2.2.2

#### Support establishment of effective national risk management systems to de-risk the agriculture value chain

This emanates from the fears expressed by farmers that their investment, especially in high yielding seeds, could get wiped off overnight as a result of exogenous factors that include pest infestation, weather precipitations events, etc. Presently there are existing technologies, such as fertilizers and high-quality seeds, that can dramatically improve yields for farmers who only have an acre or two of land. However, farmers are

dissuaded to invest in these technologies for fear of losing their entire investments because of the existence of several risks factors that include increasing risk of climate variability and unpredictability as a result of climate change. A major challenge in this regard is the limited funding which leads to low payouts that is grossly insufficient to offset real losses. In addition, there is limited capacity to create affordable insurance products that cover actual losses. Solutions to these challenges requires de-risking investment decisions for smallholders against weather and pest shocks. A pilot micro-insurance product underwritten by the Bank to be explored to encourage risk taking for crop inputs. Paying premium discounts should also be targeted. Funding all or part of premiums efficiently puts money in the hands of vulnerable populations through payouts during times of shocks and allow them to support themselves in good time. Alternatively, regenerative practices that work with local seed supplies, encourage community-based natural farming that increase climate resilience, allow carbon sequestration to make soils more resilient to drought should also be supported. Lessons from Andhra Pradesh (AP) Community-managed Natural Farming (CNF) program or other large-scale positive deviance livelihoods programs need to mind for solutions that can be applied within COVID-19 limitations.

### 2.2.3

#### **Intensify policy works to protect African farmers from the negative effects of market concentration in global and domestic markets**

Africa continues to lack regional frameworks for farmer coordination. Redress of this situation could be achieved through the establishment of a regulatory framework at the pan-African level. Such a framework would protect producers and local economies from capital drain due to globally acting oligopolies and monopolies. Prioritize developing sound regional integration policies and focus on deploying innovative digital financing tools for young (innovative) entrepreneurs and women.

### 2.2.4

#### **Focused implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) with emphasis on critical role of RECs in ensuring food security**

However, this may lead to emergence of uneven distribution of gains from AfCFTA across Regional Economic Communities (REC) and across countries with losers and winners evolving, including in food production and trading. Given the diversity of countries involved in the AfCFTA, there would be the trilemma of special and differential treatment of member countries,

tackling behind-the-border measures, and removal of all policy-imposed barriers to trade. The AfDB to continue supporting countries with knowledge synthesis and policy dialogue to for the domestication of AfCFTA and provide necessary technical assistance for implementation.

## 2.2.5

### **Streamline and harmonize regulations and policy to avoid duplication and reinventing the wheel**

There is lack of coordination among multilateral and bilateral institutions in their in-country operations. In some instances, similar support projects are duplicated, leading to unintended overlapping activities, and inconsistencies and inefficiencies of effort and funds. Establishment of a multilateral coordination platform or mechanisms for strengthening the use of existing ones, if available, would go a long way to streamline support from these international development partners.

## 2.2.6

### **Strengthen 'regional food security' and the resilience of regional food supply chains**

The challenge, though, is that there is absence of a regional frameworks for coordinating and managing regional food security and supply chains in Africa. To get around this challenge and ensure successful information of this policy option, bilateral and multilateral institutions need to support countries to establish a harmonized regulatory framework for attaining and maintaining regional food security. This support will rely greatly on the superior knowledge of bilateral and multilateral institutions given their wider operational scope, including the establishment of policies targeting regional food security.

## 2.2.7

### **Refocus project financing from supporting big projects to smaller projects that have potentials for inclusive and sustainable rural transformation**

Managing several smallholder agriculture and food supply projects could be challenging, tasking and costly for multilateral institutions, especially development finance institutions. A solution would be to aggregate smallholder farmers into farmer organizations, self-help groups and cooperatives and then deal with them as a group. Bilateral and multilateral institutions wishing to engage in this area need to partner with and leverage experiences of other donors that have comparative advantage in engaging and interfacing directly with smallholder farmers.

## 2.2.8

### Invest in basic rural infrastructure development to improve domestic and intra-African value chains

Africa is characterized by low logistics performance (cost, time and reliability), uncoordinated strategies for industrial development, and a misconception of countries' comparative advantage. These hinder intra-African value-chain developments. To get around this, develop a multi-national legal and regulatory framework to govern infrastructure development operations should be developed and deployed.

## 2.2.9

### Identify targeted international collaborations for promoting smallholder farming

The current experience in Africa where there is a weak regional collaborative and partnership structures and frameworks may inhibit implementation of this policy option. One possible solution is to set up an African Centre of Excellence for Smallholder Farm Management to speed up the transformation from subsistence to enterprise farming by smallholders. Facilitate participation of smallholder farmers in regional food business by enhancing their access to food safety and quality certificates and assisting them to establish critical linkages with supermarkets and large-scale off-takers. Digitalization of food safety protocols with capacity to release blockchain-backed quality certificates should be considered.



## 2.3

### Long-term policies for building resilient post-COVID-19 economies

For the long term, the G-CoP experts focused on building resilient economies that are not just able to withstand the negative impacts of the COVID-19, but also able to endure future similar exogenous shocks, no matter the forms it might take. Some of the key recommendations offered are highlighted below:

#### 2.3.1

#### Strengthen resilience of regional food supply chains through AfCFTA

Presently, there is an absence of strong regional and continental coordinating frameworks for effective and smooth functioning of the regional food supply chains. This brings to light the urgent need to finalize arrangements for the takeoff of AfCFTA and ensure its operational launch. Support of value chain optimization using digital integration to agriculture will also be a complementary policy action in addition to promoting intra-regional trade in food by eliminating regulatory trade barriers that include sanitary and phytosanitary measures and tackling issues around food safety.

#### 2.3.2

#### Incentivize investment in agriculture and agribusiness

Agriculture and food production activities are notorious for their high risk and low yield nature. To deal with this challenge, build productive agriculture and food production business models in addition to investing in client-oriented extension systems that closely link research and rural practice. Developing a regional agriculture de-risking system would also provide additional support. The Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL) that provides a US\$500 million insurance risk guarantees to farmers is a good example of a model that can be upscaled to a continental level.

#### 2.3.3

#### Prioritize food security and agricultural development as a regional security strategy

Food security is hardly considered a priority in tackling insecurity in Africa. Prioritize designating food security as a key component of regional security. It is high time that bilateral and multilateral development institutions designate food security as a key component of regional security strategies and build it into their projects, programs and interventions in Africa.

## 2.3.4

### Strengthen investment in regional infrastructure

This would help to relieve pressure on chokepoints and reduce the time and cost of moving agricultural and food products regionally. Large infrastructure financing gaps requiring substantial resources to fill is a key issue that must be dealt with, in addition to dealing with weak regional infrastructure development coordination. Fast track implementation of regional infrastructure initiatives such as the Yamoussoukro Decision on Open Skies, the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), etc. Leveraging works of existing regional infrastructure development initiatives such as the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa (ICA) and the African Infrastructure Country Diagnostic (AICD) to identify key infrastructure interventions that promise the highest possible impact. Look for synergies in infrastructure planning – deployment that delivers extractives, energy production, transport corridors, etc. A condition should be developed that makes it compulsory that infrastructure must speak to more than one sector to get the required wide-ranging impact.

## 2.3.5

### Build more resilient regional staple food production systems and establish regional staple food programmes

Limited experience and information on existing regional opportunities would hinder implementation of this policy option. To find a way around this, private sector stakeholders should explore and develop trade relations with African suppliers as alternatives as well as complements to European or Asian markets. The starting point would be local substitution for imports. In addition, harnessing regional comparative advantage requires expanding value chains and food systems that are confined to the continent. Embrace value chain-anchored and technology-driven agriculture and food production systems.

## 2.3.6

### Institute regional research development and collaboration in key products and effective inter-cropping

The poor state of some research institutions in Africa would be a weakening factor in their efforts to forge collaboration with themselves and the outside world. While several African institutions are doing well in this regard, many others are faced with challenging enabling environment, especially absence of necessary equipment. This leads to difficulties in talent retention of exceptional scientists and researchers with occurrence of brain drain. This would be further exacerbated by a weak coordination framework for cooperation. Therefore, regional economic communities need better coordination to

focus research on specific staple crops as champions based on their respective comparative advantages and best ways to grow them sustainably and productively. Each region could focus on specific staple(s) while allowing other regions with more expertise in others to focus on them. This will pave way for synergy and avoidance of dissipating limited energies on unnecessary and unproductive duplications.

### 2.3.7

#### Strengthen regional early warning systems to minimise the effects of disasters

Poor data and technology as well as weak institutional capacities for intelligence gathering and coordination at the country and regional levels are major hurdles that must be overcome. Strengthening existing regional institutions as well as private sector organizations involved in early warning systems through targeted capacity building programs would help.

### 2.3.8

#### Establish regional staple food programmes

Absence of regional framework for staple food programme development could make this impossible or difficult to implement. Develop regional investment program that focuses on cultivating new suppliers of food at the international market level. The African Development Bank's African Investment Forum provides excellent opportunities for regional synergy in developing relevant investment projects in regional food programmes.

### 2.3.9

#### Help keep small and medium scale farmers active through targeted policy responses

There is tendency to apply a general one-size-fits-all policy intervention to a wide range of countries just as has been done in the past. There is need to break away from the past by designing and implementing tailored country-specific technical assistance for food production with focus on small and medium scale farmers.

### 2.3.10

#### Foster global cooperation particularly in agricultural research and development

Poor funding of African universities and research centers, weak network between African scientific institutions and their global counterparts, and weak networking among regional African scientific institutions are implementation hurdles that must be mitigated. Furthermore, talent attraction and retention is critical to success. The importance of building infrastructure that will improve the quality of life cannot be better emphasized. Mitigating measures would include creating mechanisms to support funding

of high-end research through collaborative mechanisms with other universities globally. Coordinate regional cooperation among agricultural policy institutes, universities and national research institutes, in Africa and globally. The cooperation must include interface with industry to chart an agenda for promoting research to support agro-industrialization, ensure policy relevance and support skills-matching, especially in ways that support youth and women led micro-enterprises.

### 2.3.11

#### Ensure structural, institutional, regulatory and legal country-level reforms that focus on the agricultural sector

Existence of inefficient regulatory and legal frameworks that lack efficiency, competence and economy, clear role delineation, accountability, independence, innovation, transparency, and fairness could make implementation of this policy a challenge. Added to this is corruption and non-compliance with existing regulations by individuals and businesses. To remove these potential clogs, support establishment of a National Food Agency, a statutory multi-agency to oversee food safety and security in each African country and link them up with a regional supra-national institution to provide oversight. Institutions to include in this regulatory arrangement would be Ministries of Agriculture, Finance, Health, National Planning and Development, Trade, Labour, Education, and Information Communication Technology. Support creation of legal frameworks that promote agricultural and rural cooperatives.

### 2.3.12

#### Build capacity to respond to shocks

Unfortunately, many people exhibit short memories and tendency to quickly go back to business as usual. Strengthen continental early warning systems, particularly through investment in early warning agencies and institutions. Strengthen Africa-led policy research institutions so that they can become engines of knowledge generation and innovation for providing response to managing shocks. Leverage ADI's Country Capacity Needs Assessments being undertaken for African countries to identify key challenges related to developing relevant country capacity development strategies that incorporates strategies for responding to shocks.

### 2.3.13

#### Re-examine structural frameworks for engaging and supporting African countries

Today, some bilateral and multilateral agencies adopt a silos-oriented approaches to in-country engagements. African countries need to be supported to domesticate the High-5s through technical assistance and funding from African Development Bank and other development finance institutions operating in Africa.

### 2.3.14

## Coordinate with other institutions in education, health, environment, etc., and not just agriculture in isolation

There is a tendency to treat agriculture and food production in isolation or leave it to agriculture-focused development institutions to handle. Use the donor coordination platforms in each country to foster holistic approaches to agriculture and food production development.





# 03 Policy timing, design, and implementation

Whichever policy options are chosen, countries should pay attention to the policy design, sequencing and the timing of implementation. Poorly designed recovery policy is likely to be ineffective in delivering desired economic outcomes regardless of theoretical potential. Countries are advised to avoid “copy pasting” policies designed for other contexts such as the “lockdown” policy. Policy-makers should proactively engage local experts and scientists to help them identify the appropriateness of policies in their local conditions.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, policymakers should map out the potential multiplier effects and co-benefits on other sectors of the economy at the policy design stage. It was noted that lack of capacity for policy implementation is also an ongoing concern on the continent. Policy design should include clear indicators of accountability and strategies for monitoring progress to maximize impact. National contexts and priorities differ and so should the policies targeted at addressing them.

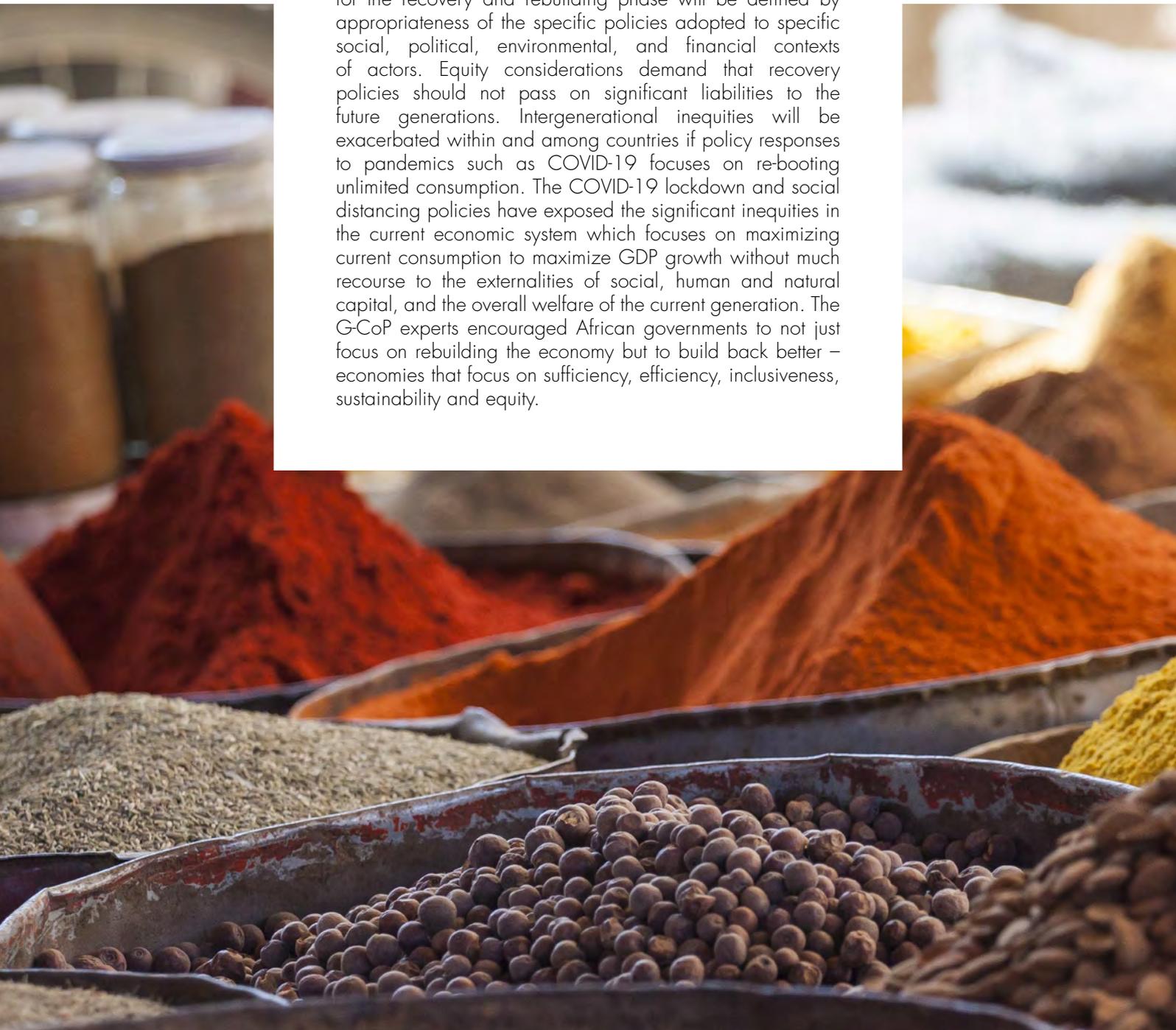
It is also crucial to engage stakeholders, including the private sector, farmers, processors, exporters and service providers, domestic and foreign investors, the civil society, NGOs, etc. to create incentives and enhance impact. Need also a clear identification of actors, responsibilities and timeline as well as establishing support institutions and programmes and a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for a successful implementation. A key principle for the implementation should be to work with or build on existing structures and mechanisms instead of creating additional layers to avoid duplication and the waste of scarce resources where applicable.

The G-CoP experts noted that policy timing, timeliness and flexibility in implementation will be important characteristics for achieving the desired outcomes. In the context of COVID-19, there are many known unknowns and unknown unknowns. It is yet unclear how long the pandemic will last and whether there will be recurrence after the first cycle. With the current nationalistic approaches to the prevention and containment measures, it is very likely that hotspots of the

<sup>3</sup> The African Development Institute’s Global Community of Practice (G-CoP) provides a platform for member countries to access world class certified experts on specialized policy themes for rapid response policy advisory services, training and technical assistance to the Bank’s Member Countries.

virus may remain in less developed countries, especially in Africa, for much longer. These could become future epicentres for another global spread of the virus. In addition, it remains unclear whether the estimated recession will be deeper than projected with possible default cascades. The discussion on the shape of the recovery of the economies remain unclear. It is yet to be seen whether economies will take the “V”, “U”, prolonged “U” or even a “W” or “L” shaped recovery path. Without a coordinated global action, the recovery path may likely be a multiple “W”, if there are multiple waves in future.

While extreme urgency was required in introducing prevention and containment policies, that were sometimes inappropriate for local conditions, successful policies for the recovery and rebuilding phase will be defined by appropriateness of the specific policies adopted to specific social, political, environmental, and financial contexts of actors. Equity considerations demand that recovery policies should not pass on significant liabilities to the future generations. Intergenerational inequities will be exacerbated within and among countries if policy responses to pandemics such as COVID-19 focuses on re-booting unlimited consumption. The COVID-19 lockdown and social distancing policies have exposed the significant inequities in the current economic system which focuses on maximizing current consumption to maximize GDP growth without much recourse to the externalities of social, human and natural capital, and the overall welfare of the current generation. The G-CoP experts encouraged African governments to not just focus on rebuilding the economy but to build back better – economies that focus on sufficiency, efficiency, inclusiveness, sustainability and equity.



# 04 Lessons learned

**T**here are several useful lessons countries could learn from the experience on how the agriculture and food-related impact of COVID-19 pandemic is being handled. A few of these are highlighted below.

1. Do not keep the borders closed for too long. Otherwise, more persons may die from the “hunger virus” than coronavirus.
2. Prioritization of regional and global agricultural cooperation and partnerships, particularly in R&D, is vital.
3. Sustainable, cost efficient and resilient food systems are regional and seldomly respect national borders.
4. Increased intra-regional trade in food staples can play a significant role in reducing domestic food price volatility.
5. Global, regional, and national food-reserve systems need to be established and strengthened.
6. Export restrictions based on poor coordination and lack of data about food availability can turn into a food crisis<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> During the current crisis, approximately 16 countries making up less than 15% of global trade have put up food export restrictions and the impact is less.

# 05 Conclusion

**F**ood is a basic need and food production and distribution are the most impacted activities by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to existing vulnerabilities, Africa is likely to be severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in various ramifications that include food availability and security. With the collapse of economies and loss of jobs, the social distancing, lock-downs and border closures designed to flatten the COVID-19 disease curve are likely to kill more than the virus in Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic is a reminder of the age-old value of nations being able to feed themselves. The African Development Institute (ADI) of the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) convened a Global Community of Practice (G-CoP) on COVID-19 response strategies to support countries with evidence-based policy response strategies, capacity development and technical assistance.

The G-CoP experts proffered several pragmatic policy recommendations available to national governments for promoting agriculture and food production and building resilience in the sector, structured into short, medium and long term. In the short term, the following policy options were recommended, among several others: coordinate cross-learning at regional level; provide regional storage mechanism to ensure easy supply of basic food; incentivize investment in agriculture and agribusinesses; fill data and knowledge gaps by providing reliable and credible data; grant regional market access for food trade; promote and improve safety standards – through Regional Bureaus of standards; provide technology-based solutions for food production; provide sustainable finance for agriculture and food production; and coordinate response at regional and global levels to provide support for national efforts.

In the medium term, bilateral and multilateral institutions were encouraged to: invest in regional Special Food Processing Zones (SFPZs); support establishment of effective national risk management systems to de-risk the agriculture value chain; intensify policy works to protect African farmers from the negative effects of market concentration in global and domestic markets; focused implementation of the AfCFTA with focus on critical role of RECs in ensuring food security; avoid reinventing the wheel; focus on preventing duplication of interventions; strengthen 'regional food security' and the resilience of regional food supply chains; refocus project financing from supporting big projects to smaller projects that have potentials for inclusive and sustainable rural transformation; and invest in





basic rural infrastructure development to improve domestic and intra-African value chains.

The long-term policy options recommended by the G-CoP experts include: strengthen resilience of regional food supply chains through AfCFTA; incentivize investment in agriculture and agribusiness; prioritize food security and agricultural development as a regional security strategy; identify targeted international collaborations for promoting smallholder farming; strengthen investment in regional infrastructure; build more resilient regional staple food production systems; institute regional research development and collaboration in key products; strengthen regional early warning systems to minimise the effects of disasters; establish regional staple food programmes; help keep small and medium farmers active through targeted policy responses; foster global cooperation particularly in agricultural research and development; ensure structural, institutional, regulatory and legal country-level reforms that focus on the agricultural sector; build capacity to respond to shocks; re-examine structural frameworks for engaging and supporting African countries; and coordinate with other institutions in education, health, environment, etc., and not just agriculture in isolation.

Careful review as well as tailored and focused implementation of these policies would hold high promise for African countries to contain the negative impact of the pandemic on agriculture and food production, strengthen jobs and livelihoods in laying the foundation for economic rebuilding, real time data based decision making from farm to government and develop the needed resilience to withstand, not just the current pandemic, but any future exogenous shocks.

**African Development Institute (ADI),  
African Development Bank Group**  
“Strengthening capacity for inclusive growth in Africa – without which  
the global sustainable development goals and Africa’s Agenda 2063  
will not be achieved”

**Contact: [adigcop@afdb.org](mailto:adigcop@afdb.org)**

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