



CONCEPT NOTE

COMMEMORATION OF THE 12TH AFRICA DAY FOR FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

“Rediscovering Our Local African Diets for Sustainable Food Systems and
Nutrition”

29 October 2021

1. Background

Following persistent episodes of food and nutrition insecurity on the continent, the Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government, sitting in their 15th Ordinary Session in Kampala, Uganda, declared every 30th October to be the commemoration of the Africa Day for Food and Nutrition Security (ADFNS). The Decision requested the AU Commission and AU Development Agency-NEPAD and partners to organize this event at continental level, and urged every Member State to mark it. A side event convened on the margins of this Summit under the banner “Africa must feed itself.

The ADFNS has so far been successfully commemorated 11 times following its launch in Lilongwe, Malawi, on 31st October 2010. Ten successive editions of the Day were hosted by Ethiopia, AU Headquarters, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Tanzania and Egypt. Due to COVID-19, the 2020 edition of the ADFNS was commemorated virtually under the theme “*Resilient Food Systems toward Healthy Diets for the Vulnerable during Emergencies: Lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic*”.

2. Lessons so far learnt from earlier editions of the ADFNS

Experience from earlier editions of the ADFNS Commemoration suggest the event has provided a platform for knowledge sharing, exchange of experiences and passing key messages to the audience. The event is also used as a platform for influential and policy leaders to express their commitments and rally other leaders to emulate them. For those ADFNS events that were hosted by Members States, policy leaders such as presidents, prime ministers and ministers used the event for showcasing their achievements and strategies for improving their countries’ food and nutrition security situation. For example, in 2014 the then host of the ADFNS, the Democratic Republic of Congo, took participants by storm when the then Congolese Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture took visiting VIPs to irrigated farming project sites. Earlier in 2013, visiting participants learned a lot about Niger’s total commitment to eradicating food and nutrition insecurity and gaining resilience against food shocks through the country’s flagship Nigeriens Feeding Nigeriens (L’Initiative 3N).

Past commemorations of the ADFNS attracted significant amount of technical and financial support from both national budgets and international donor funds. Furthermore, the event has brought together a cross-section of stakeholders to interact and learn from another’s comparative advantage and experience. Stakeholders range from international partner organizations committed to funding or delivering programmes and interventions on ending hunger and malnutrition, research institutions, civil society, relevant governmental and non-organizations and bilateral and multilateral development partners.

Past events benefited from substantial support from some of these international partners; noteworthy is the continued support of FAO, WFP and UNICEF. Some partners that also contributed to some activities in some of the ADFNS editions, are WHO, Save the Children, HarvestPlus and Nutrition International. As usual, leading research organizations in food and nutrition contributed technically when called upon. These include IAEA, A4NH/IFPRI, International Potato Center and the Global Fund on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition.

3. Commemorating the 12th ADFNS

Considering the continuing COVID-19 situation, this year's ADFNS will also be commemorated virtually via video link on Friday 29 October 2021. The Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Agriculture (DARBE) is leading the preparations for the organization of the event. Depending on resources at their disposal, AU Member States are encouraged to commemorate the ADFNS based on the agreed theme. To this end, development partners and agencies committed to fighting hunger and malnutrition are encouraged to collaborate with Member States' ministries and food security agencies in the course of organizing the event.

The overarching aim of the ADFNS is to serve as a platform for rallying political, technical and financial commitments at all levels to address contemporary challenges to the implementation of food and nutrition security interventions in Africa. To-date, statistics of undernutrition, over-weight, micronutrient deficiencies, uncontrolled marketing and consumption of unsafe food and their related dire effects on health, nutritional status, wellbeing and economies on the continent, are upsetting. A number of policy recommendations – including high level decisions – have been documented to improve the situation. However, there remain substantial bottlenecks hindering efforts to reverse the situation with persistent disparities, as well as emerging challenges including conflict and climate variability. The commemoration of the ADFNS also provides a platform at national, regional and continental levels to share experiences and knowledge, and to take stock of progress made in assuring availability of quality food for improved nutrition and health of all Africans.

4. Rationale

Today, as the world is still reeling from the ravaging Covid-19 pandemic, it is paramount that food and nutrition security stakeholders reflect and move towards practical solutions and measured options which result in sustainable and resilient food systems. Covid-19 has uncovered problems with our food systems, including consumption of foods that are poor in macro- and micronutrient diversity, over-processed, unsafe and full of substances that cause

under-nutrition, over-weight and obesity and are not sustainably produced. Growing populations, particularly in urban areas, are getting trapped into eating diets full of sugar, starch, fats and other condiments that cause non-communicable diseases. Meanwhile, there is a horde of our own diets that are being orphaned or neglected that over ages have proved resilient to adverse climatic conditions, such as shortage of rains and water, increased temperature, strong winds and storms. Year after year, we are falling prey to consumption of heavily industrialized diets, with their harmful additives and depleted natural ingredients.

Therefore, it is time that we go back to basics and re-examine the foods and diets which our ancestors depended on and that are scientifically proven to be resilient to the changing weather patterns, and are rich in nutrient and micronutrient content. Scientific evidence shows that sustained consumption of diets that are characteristically bio-diverse, potent with different micronutrients, such as vitamins, iron, zinc, calcium and manganese, equips the body with significant immunity to prevent certain non-communicable conditions. Authoritative information suggest that healthy bodies are resilient to Covid-19 than those that suffer from existing conditions such as overweight and obesity, diabetes and malnutrition deficiency.

The ADFNS event is configured around discussing, sharing experiences and recommending a range of strategies, initiatives and actions that will galvanize Africa's policy and support to be inclined towards investing in resilient food systems, more so in multiplication, production, processing, distribution and consumption of our own (local or indigenous) food that have since long adapted to our climates, soils and biodiversity, needing no use of the costly industrial fertilizers and seed improvement technologies, which by far have proved unsustainable and not pro-poor.

Technical dialogues will also center on how to take investments in value chains of resilient and nutrient-dense African crops to scale, how to advocate for them and how to overcome challenges that might hinder the scale-up and wide use of these emerging or 'back to basics' initiatives. The event will harness and garner key messages to consolidate advocacy and stimulate the necessary action to translate words into reality.

5. Theme and Sub-themes

In light of the above rationale for commemorating this year's Africa Day for Food and Nutrition Security and in line with the AU's 2021 theme of 'Arts, Culture and Heritage,' it has been proposed that the event will be focused on the theme:

“Rediscovering Our Local African Diets for Sustained Food Systems and Nutrition”

This main theme invokes four sub-thematic areas to inform technical dialogue, messaging, media content and recommendations for the way forward.

Sub-theme 1: Strategic directions for promoting increased production and processing of nutrient-rich African food crops

African or indigenous foods have been part of the African ecosystems, have provided dietary diversity and are, subsequently, powerful sources of nutrients and better health (Mbhenyane, 2017). Recently published articles in peer reviewed nutrition journals on African food crops by researchers such as Moyo and Aremo (2021), Gowele et al. (2019), Neugart et al. (2017), Kruger et al. (2015, 2018), and Icard-Vernière et al. (2016) have provided strong evidence on some nutritional benefits of some of the African green leafy vegetables commonly consumed in rural areas across the continent.

The diversity of African foods and diets is not limited to plants and crops only, but also extends to animal breeds and insects that have been in existence and consumed for generations. Indigenous or traditional breeds of chicken, rabbits, goats, cattle and other domesticated animals have been in African dishes for centuries. Animal breed researchers such as Mapiye et al. (2020), Adeleke et al. (2011), Padhi (2016), Reta (2009) and Strydom (Strydom et al., 2000), among many, provide evidence on the importance of indigenous African animal and poultry breeds in providing dietary diversity and nutrient availability; thus contributing immensely to lessening Africa's nutrient deficiency burden.

Africa is also endowed with riches of edible insects that, albeit seasonally, have been part of some African diet since time immemorial. Considerable laboratory-based research establishes the nutritional and food security benefits of some of the edible insect species in some African food cultures (See Ayieko, 2010; Ayieko & Kinyuru, 2012; Babiker et al., 2007; Braide et al., 2011).

National food consumption surveys estimate per capita consumption relative to the recommended amounts and determine the dietary adequacy of foods for vulnerable populations including women of reproductive age and children¹². For instance, the Ethiopia Food Consumption survey found that although Ethiopian children consumed foods with adequate energy density, they were very low in micronutrients especially calcium, zinc and iron. Several strategies are recommended for increasing the micronutrient density of local foods – these include dietary strategies that calculate the nutrient gaps using linear programming methods and recommend food based approaches and food fortification.

¹ Aregash Samuel, Sara Wuehler, Michelle Gibbs, et al., Overview of the Ethiopian National Food Consumption Survey (NFCS): Implications for Fortification Programs, 2015/01/10, 961 – 962378, 5 10.9734/EJNFS/2015/21186, European Journal of Nutrition & Food Safety

² Aregash Samuel, Saskia J. M. Osendarp, et al. Identifying Dietary Strategies to Improve Nutrient Adequacy among Ethiopian Infants and Young Children Using Linear Modelling, Nutrients, 24 June 2019

It is on these grounds that there is a compelling case for moving toward promotion of production, processing and consumption of these locally available and accessible food crops. Shared experiences through panel presentations, group and plenary discussions informed by Sub-theme 1 will focus on how to leverage on available evidence for developing strategies for increasing production and consumption of the range of foods that have been proven to grow well and characterized with environmental resilience, bio-availability of nutrient quality and sustained livelihoods for ages. Expert dialogue will also focus on advocacy mechanisms to remove certain food taboos and how to improve palatability of the Africa diets and enhance their prominence in Africa food systems.

Sub-theme 2: Scaling up innovative technologies for intensive processing and diversification of African diets

Agriculture and farming technologies for making certain food crops and animal breeds resilient, adapting to different soil types and weather patterns have been on the increase. This is a resounding answer facing our traditional methods that retard growth in the agriculture and animal husbandry sectors. The challenges hindering dissemination, popularization and adoption of these emerging technologies and innovations are well noted in the Framework for African Food Security (New Partnership for Africa's Development, 2009) and food and nutrition security literature. The Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa (Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, 2014) emphasizes the need to adopt new technologies and innovations in crop and animal production systems. The essence of Sub-theme 2 is, therefore, to stimulate multisectoral expert dialogue, including farmers on possible pathways for scaling up and wide scientific technologies so that they get their way into adoption and increased use in our farms. Discussion will also set focus on how to attract and establish public-private partnerships for utilizing research products, benefiting from initiatives that have worked and produced impact.

Sub-theme 3: Enhanced market availability and reach of nutrient-dense African foods

Sub-theme 3 is expected to bring together experts and practitioners, especially from the private sector and civil society, to share experiences and dialogue around making produced and processed African foods go beyond village and peri-urban markets, to high-end modern markets. Discussions will deliberately focus on challenges and opportunities along the way of market availability and accessibility of the local and traditional African crops. Discussions will also probe strategies for making young people improve consumption of the diversity of locally available and resilient food crops and animal breeds.

Sub-theme 4: Creating enabling policy environment for leveraging private sector investment in local diets for transformed African food systems

Sub-theme 4 will set focus on the grey area that is the near-absence of private sector investment in indigenous and local Africa food value chains. This topic will seek to garner insights of food policy specialists, food fortification, take critical look into the disabling factors and endeavour to find entry points for motivating private sector investment beyond the limited micro-enterprise or hawking markets.

6. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose for commemorating the 2021 ADFNS is to increase awareness of our own African Foods, bring them into the agribusiness domain, and motivate wide acceptability of diets. It is also aimed at building a compelling case for integrating African foods (both from plants and animals) into our different food systems. The enabling objectives of the 2021 ADFNS are:

- i. To act as a one-stop shop for sharing experiences and lessons and motivating wide recognition, production and investment in local and traditional African crops and animal breeds to form diverse and sustainable food systems; thus, catalyzing improved food and nutrition security on the continent.
- ii. To act as a platform for making local and traditional African foods adopt new production and processing technologies and, virtually, become readily available with increase in demand.
- iii. To garner consensus, strategic directions and recommendations for policy makers to consider, ultimately leading to influencing political will and an enabled environment for scaled-up production, processing, market availability and consumption of our African diets within the context of our different food systems.

7. Expected Outcomes

The overriding outcome expected from the commemoration of the 12th ADFNS is to arrive at a common understanding and appreciation of the need to enrich African food systems by utilizing the opportunity we have in the form of rich biodiversity of own local or traditional foods, which have over the years been diminishing in both production and consumption. By so doing, the event hopes to widen the range of Africa's food baskets, increase nutrient bioavailability and drastically cut food insecurity and malnutrition on the continent.

This outcome will be presented in the form of a final communiqué of the event. The event will also produce the summary and synthesis of the technical discussions and recommendations for action.

8. Technical, Communication and Advocacy Inputs

The commemoration of the 12th ADFNS will draw its significance through the following categories of inputs:

- i. A message from an eminent personality or champion of food security and nutrition.
- ii. Presentation of a summary of key recommendations from a technical discussion session, which is to precede the ceremonial event.
- iii. A 30-minutes Learning and Experience Sharing prelude in the form of video documentaries showcasing different works of partners or stakeholder organisations in fighting hunger and malnutrition in parts of Africa by way of projects and initiatives for improving production and consumption of local or traditional foods.

9. Form, Format and Timing of the Event

In the wake of the Covid-19 Pandemic and several travel restrictions, the event will take place **virtually via a webinar** platform. Two such Webinars will take place as follows:

- **Technical Dialogue informed by the theme of the ADFNS:** To convene on **28th October 2021** and will bring together technical experts to dialogue along the four sub-themes and produce a set of key messages to be presented to the wider audience of the commemorative event (i.e., the Main Event on 29th October 2021). The Dialogue will be divided into two segments of two parallel sessions each, and each session will last for the duration of **120 minutes (two hours)**.
- **The main (commemorative) event:** This second webinar will take place on **Friday, 29th October 2021** and will feature a programme as outlined in Section (7) above. This webinar will last for **90 minutes**.
- Both events will have **spontaneous interpretations** in English and French.

10. Preparations for the Event

A continental level Joint Steering Committee led by the AU Commission and working in collaboration with the AUDA-NEPAD, A4NH, WFP, FAO, UNICEF, FARA, HarvestPlus, the International Potato Center, IAEA and Nutrition International will be set up comprising of international organizations, bilateral development partners and International Non-governmental Organisations, will be formed. This Joint Steering Committee will meet bi-weekly from July 2021 to discuss progress and address actions which need to be taken.

11. Participation

The event is expected to attract as many participants as possible. Invitations will be sent out via web links to potential resource persons, experts and general participants, including from members of the public, delegates from both the host country and other Member States, stakeholder organisations and institutions, including government institutions, the private sectors, academia and technical institutions.

12. Focal Persons

The focal persons for the ADFNS and their contacts are as follows:

1. **Dr. Simplicite Nouala Fonkou**, Head of Agriculture and Food Security Division, Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, African Union Commission – Email: NoualaS@africa-union.org (Overall Coordinator)
2. **Beatrice Egulu**, Food Security Officer, AU Commission – Email: nakacwaB@africa-union.org (Event Facilitator and Coordinator)
3. **Peace Mutuwa**, Communication and Technical Support – Email: MutuwaP@africa-union.org

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