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The nexus between food security, peace and stability calls for a holistic approach in policy design.

Food systems are defined as the networks needed to produce, transform, and distribute food to consumers. These systems encompass everything from agricultural production and supply chains to storage, transportation, and retail. Resilient food systems ensure that nutritious food is accessible and affordable, reducing vulnerability to shocks such as climate change, pandemics, and economic downturns. Weak food systems invariably lead to food insecurity.

Dr. Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, African Union Special Envoy for Food Systems asserts that food insecurity is not just a humanitarian issue; it is a fundamental driver of economic shocks, instability, and conflict. Across Africa, millions of people face chronic hunger, with dire consequences for social cohesion and national security. The bulk of those affected live in isolated, hard-to-reach areas where nutritious food remains scarce and expensive.

In 2022, Africa was home to 282 million hungry people—38% of the global total. Eastern Africa had the highest number of undernourished people in 2022, with 134.6 million, followed by 62.8 million in Western Africa, 57 million in Central Africa, 19.5 million in Northern Africa, and 7.6 million in Southern Africa. Africa is currently off track in achieving the food security and nutrition goals set by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 and the Malabo targets aimed at eradicating hunger and malnutrition by 2025.

While important progress was made between 2000 and 2010, hunger has surged in recent years, with most of the decline occurring between 2019 and 2022. Even when food is available, post-harvest losses, inadequate infrastructure, and market volatility further entrench food insecurity. The consequences are stark: malnutrition, economic hardship, and, increasingly, violent conflict.

Climate change has worsened food insecurity by negatively impacting livestock feed, forage, and water availability, increasing heat stress, and altering the distribution of pests and diseases. This has led to a reduction in animal productivity and purchasing power, making food even more inaccessible to vulnerable populations. Let me paint a picture: In 2021, the average cost of maintaining a healthy diet in Africa stood at 3.57 purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars per person per day, marking a 5.6 percent increase from its 2020 level. This cost was significantly higher than the extreme poverty threshold of 2.15 PPP dollars per person per day, making it unaffordable not just for the poor but also for a substantial portion of those classified as non-poor.

More than one billion people—over three-quarters of Africa’s population—were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021, an increase of 51 million people since the COVID-19 pandemic. The largest cumulative increases between 2019 and 2021 were recorded in Western Africa and Eastern Africa. The rising cost of a healthy diet across Africa, except in Northern Africa, continues to undermine food security and nutrition, pushing more people into dietary deprivation.

By 2021, 77.5 percent of Africa’s population—accounting for over one-third of the global population in this situation—lacked access to an affordable healthy diet. Eastern Africa and Western Africa were particularly affected, with nearly 70 percent of Africa’s population unable to afford nutritious food. At a subregional level, 362 million people (84.6 percent of the population) in Eastern Africa, and 350 million people (85.4 percent) in Western Africa faced this challenge. While the numbers were relatively lower in Southern Africa (46 million), Northern Africa (128.5 million), and Central Africa (154.5 million), they still represented over half of the total population in these regions.

The interconnectedness of food security and peace and security calls for a holistic approach in policy design. The agricultural cycle has been disrupted by increased

flooding and extreme drought, and water is increasingly rare. Stray animals may ravage plantations, and many farmers have only a traditional understanding of food production and conservation methods.

The cycle of armed conflict in some parts of the region is preventing food, seed, and livestock from circulating freely, severely impacting the agriculture industry. As a result, food is scarce and prices are skyrocketing, putting the inhabitants' food security at risk. How do we bridge the gap between immediate need and long-term solutions? Until we address the underlying issues of the resilience and sustainability of food systems, the need for humanitarian food aid will continue to escalate.

There is great pressure on land hence we cannot be in business as usual, we must decide to help farmers rapidly adapt to climate change, including through a focus on regenerative agriculture. The role of local communities in humanitarian situations is crucial, and there is a need for innovative approaches to enhance their resilience as host communities to address spillover concerns on the scarcity of services and resources. This would also promote indigenous food.

Synergy in resource mobilization and dismantling agency-silo approaches is necessary to ensure an effective response. By addressing data collection and utilization challenges, anticipatory measures can be improved, ensuring that interventions are both effective and equitable. Integrating security early warning systems with humanitarian and food systems—through delivery methods, source management, and sustainability—is critical to breaking the cycle of food insecurity and instability.

The Feed Africa Strategy and the African Risk Capacity (ARC) initiative offer practical solutions. The Africa Risk Capacity (ARC) initiative provides insurance against droughts and other climate-related shocks, enabling African governments to respond quickly to crises and preventing food shortages from spiraling into full-blown humanitarian disasters. There is also the Feed Africa Strategy, spearheaded by the African Development Bank, aims to transform agriculture into a wealth-generating sector by investing in agricultural technology, irrigation, and value chains to boost food production and enhance food security. These two practical solutions are embedded in the Kampala Declaration.

We must ensure that farmers are able to grow crops and generate an income during a crisis and in its aftermath, which preserves their dignity, strengthens their resilience to future shocks, and reduces their dependence on external assistance... Food security is not just about feeding people—it is essential for the economic security of households and the long-term stability of nations.

Consider the case of Singapore, a former British colony and a small island nation. This country with meagre natural agricultural resources has ensured its food security by incorporating food security into its Total Defence Strategy, recognizing it as a national priority alongside military, civil, and economic security. Despite importing more than 90% of its food, Singapore has built one of the most resilient food systems in the world. The country achieves this through strategic diversification of import sources, investment in urban agriculture, and maintaining emergency food stockpiles.

Singapore's government has implemented Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) that require food importers to establish multiple sources of supply, reducing dependency on any single country. Additionally, urban farming initiatives, such as rooftop gardening and high-tech hydroponics, have allowed Singapore to produce food within its limited space, boosting self-sufficiency. By fostering a collaborative approach between the government, the private sector, and consumers, Singapore has demonstrated that food security is achievable even in resource-constrained environments. The essential ingredient of Singapore success has been political determination and ownership.

Africa does not require a complex, reinvented strategy—she simply needs to break free from the illusion of complexity and take decisive action. Let us strengthen cross-border food trade, embrace climate-smart agriculture, and implement policies that build resilient food systems. The path is clear, the solutions are within reach—what is needed now is the will to act decisively implement the Kampala strategy. The time to leverage our food systems to address conflict, instability and the humanitarian crisis is now.

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