

The Role of Agriculture and Food Systems for Improved Nutrition

Statement by

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on the occasion of the

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**Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen,
All Protocol Observed.**

I wish to welcome members of the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition.

I would also like to commend the Secretariat of the Panel and especially Prof Jeff Waage, our Technical Advisor for supporting our work.

1. We all know the challenges of nutrition: the number of children that are stunted is high in Africa, we also have people that are obese and those that are unhealthy on account of under-nutrition or malnutrition as shown in the presentation just made by Prof Jeff Waage.
2. African leaders are mindful of the costs that hunger and malnutrition impose on the development of African citizens and economies. Those costs are understood not only in terms of individual physical growth and cognitive development as well as social hardships, but also in terms of forgone/lost opportunities for economic growth and shared prosperity. The "Cost of Hunger in Africa Study" which was conducted in 2013 in partnership by the AUC, UNECA and WFP gives us sufficiently convincing evidence of this and so I will not belabor this point.
3. What I would like to focus on is that in responding to the challenges of nutrition, the African Union and its Member States have taken significant measures and made policy, institutional and investment interventions. As you may be aware, nutrition features among the four pillars of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) which was adopted in 2003. We have the African Regional Nutrition Strategy for the period 2005-2015 and Platforms to take it forward. We also have Africa Day for Food and Nutrition Security which the AU Heads of State and Government adopted in 2010 and is marked every year on 30 October and it rotates among AU Member States to heighten public awareness and commitment on food and the importance of nutrition. We have champions of nutrition led by His Majesty the King of Lesotho. Coupled with this, we have a continental Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Committee to support AU Member States in ensuring compliance with SPS measures and particularly food safety standards. We are also coordinating a post-harvest loss reduction programme. And, about a year

ago, we put in place the Programme of Action to Combat Aflatoxin in Africa (PACA) to make our food safe and secure as well as nutritious. But there is general agreement that we are not yet there, we need to do more.

4. And, indeed, the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation adopted by AU Heads of State and Government in June 2014 where they committed to ending hunger in Africa by 2025, did position nutrition among the central areas of focus particularly committing to eliminate child under-nutrition with a view to bringing down stunting to 10 per cent and underweight to 5 per cent . We will hence forth see more and more AU Member States mainstream nutrition issues in their agricultural transformation agenda throughout the agrifood system, from farm-level production to agro-processing and agribusiness services.

5. This will include among others:

- Incorporating explicit nutrition objectives and indicators into the design of agricultural programmes, especially the CAADP national agriculture and food security investment plans. We hope this will make agriculture work for nutrition; we must ensure that this happens.
- Promoting the diversification of food systems beyond the cereals to focus on other crops including indigenous and orphan crops, horticulture, as well as livestock and fisheries. We must focus on backyard gardens which are important in fostering the casse for nutrition.
- Increasing investment in the development or production of nutritious food crops though bio-fortification such as scaling up the orange flesh potatoes which are in plenty but have thus far not been focused on seriously.
- Expanding markets for nutritious foods and market access for vulnerable groups; and
- Establishing comprehensive food security and nutrition information systems for decision-making, policy improvement and programme assessment.

All these interventions will only be effective and deliver the desired results and impacts if they are undertaken through multi-sectoral and inter-institutional collaboration and also public-private partnership.

For us at the AUC, this process is done collaboratively with other departments. We are developing a robust implementation with tools to monitor the road towards meeting the targets which were set.

I look forward to fruitful deliberations and I thank you all for your kind attention.

