

## COMMUNIQUE

### **A call for action to mitigate food crisis in Africa caused by the current Food System**

#### **Africa Union 4<sup>th</sup> Mid - Year Coordinating Committee Meeting**

**Lusaka**

**July 2022**

*Food is essential to life. Food not only provides the basic sustenance for physical survival and nutrition for healthy human existence; food is also a key element of people's culture and rights.*

On 17<sup>th</sup> July 2022, the African Union 4<sup>th</sup> Mid - Year Coordination Meeting for the AU and Regional Economic Communities' (RECs) takes place in Lusaka, Zambia to align the work and coordinate the implementation of the continental integration agenda. This meeting happens amidst the AU theme of the year "Strengthening resilience in nutrition and food security on the Africa continent" on one hand, and the worsening food prices because of the economic and social impact of Covid-19, Ukraine war, climate-induced drought and flooding, on the other. We applaud the theme of the year as it gives an opportunity to investigate the deeper issues associated to the food crisis. We also appreciate H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairperson for AU commission request for an immediate investigation and his "deep shock and concern at the violent and degrading treatment of African migrants attempting to cross an international border from Morocco into Spain last month, 24<sup>th</sup> of June."

The rising price of food is disproportionately impacting 100 million low-income urban people across the continent, people living in poverty, many of them women headed households placing women and girls at increased risk of gender-based violence and exploitation – which is always the case in times of crisis. This rise exacerbates existing humanitarian crisis, such as the worsening drought in the Horn of Africa where over 14 million people are facing severe hunger and water shortages. Cyclone Idai in Southern Africa countries affected 2.7 million people, who are not yet fully recovered.

There are millions of refugees and internally displaced people in the Horn and West Africa because of political unrest and conflict; desperate migrants journey out of the African continent as witnessed in the recent tragic killings of Black African people while attempting to enter Melilla (Spain) from Morocco is a direct result of failures of the economic and political system including the prevailing development models, democracy deficits, inaction on climate change and on the climate reparations owed by the North to the South, and migration policies that do not respect and uphold human rights.

The impact of Covid-19 and Ukraine war on the food prices has only exposed deeper longstanding socio economic and political issues. The public sector cut, and debt is affecting communities, and particularly women, girls, and young people. The debt crisis means countries in Africa are spending on average 36% of tax revenue on repaying debt. High debt burden limits socio-economic growth and development, so external debt cancellation is needed. Furthermore, although budgets are already severely reduced, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is advising governments to introduce more austerity measures, despite evidence that this harms and undermines economic recovery, pushing more people into poverty. Unstable economies mean that governments spend less on public services including social safety nets. This is unacceptable and is hurting local communities, particularly women and young people.

The mid-year meeting in Lusaka must look at the latest food crisis as an opportunity to transform the continents' food and agricultural systems to protect livelihoods, promote seed and food sovereignty and sustain the planet. The current food system is heavily dependent on industrialization. Chemical fertilisers, has become a key component of industrialised farming systems, require copious amounts of fossil fuels for their production and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and damaging the planet.

The AU must support agroecological farming approaches, which use natural and locally available materials to build soil fertility and soil organic matter offer real benefits to farmers, healthy food to citizens, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce soil and water pollution, and increase the sustainability of food systems. This notwithstanding the needs and contribution of women farmers who produce 70% of Africa's food and a large-scale adoption of agroecology are not being prioritized by governments.

One of the key lessons of the impact of the war in Ukraine is Africa's large dependency on food imports despite its' large arable land and ideal weather for crop production and livestock. The Free Trade Agreement is an opportunity for advancing trade between Africa countries and regional blocks.

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**We the Civil Society Organisations in Zambia among them, Action Aid Zambia, PELUM Zambia, Caritas Zambia, FIAN Zambia, Zambia Climate Change Network (ZCCN) Community Development, Technology Development Trust (CTDT), Zambia Alliance for Agro ecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB), Zambia Social Forum, (ZAMSOF), CUT-International Zambia, Small Scale farmer organizations, Women Lobby groups and Social Movements from the continent, meeting in Lusaka, Zambia during the occasion of the AU 4<sup>th</sup> Mid-Year Coordination of Heads of State and Government;**

**We call on the** African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), East African Community (EAC), IGAD

and other regional bodies to urgently take collective measures with member states to address the systemic root causes of food insecurities in Africa. We therefore call upon

1. National Governments to take policy measures to subsidize food accessibility to low-income people particularly women and children.
2. National Governments must increase social protection safety nets, school feeding programmes as measures to protect vulnerable households against starvation and malnutrition
3. National Governments must invest in building national and regional food reserves to function as buffers and reduce vulnerability to food shortages and price rises
4. We call for AU and member states to develop a clear strategy on agroecology and use of indigenous seeds. AU must follow the public spending guidelines and aims of the [Malabo Declaration](#), which calls for Governments to work together to improve livelihoods through agriculture. Governments must invest and scale-up support to smallholder farmers, especially women and sustainable agroecological approaches to farming, so farmers can improve soil fertility for crop production, without the use of expensive fossil-fuel chemical fertilizers.
5. Call upon National Governments to institute immediate reforms in the farm input programmes and national research centres that integrates communities' Indigenous knowledge to be more responsive to the needs of small-Scale Farmers (including access to traditional seed varieties and organic fertilizers) to increase seed sovereignty and strengthen agroecology.
6. AU and member states need to accelerate climate justice as a continental and international priority - as climate change will drive 122 million more people into poverty by 2030.
7. African Governments and the African Union must shift public and private finance away from industrial agriculture and fossil fuels to avoid making the climate crisis even worse and liberate funds for communities' resilience-building to future shocks and stresses.
8. African countries act collectively and united to get the necessary fiscal space to fund them. Thus, we appeal to the AU to collectively resist any pressures to impose austerity policies and cuts to public spending – which are too often recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in response to rising prices. In the face of the current conflict on Ukraine, the climate crisis and Covid, African countries need to invest more, not less, in gender responsive public services. Instead of austerity and public sector wage bill constraints, governments must invest in ambitious and progressive tax reforms that pass the burden on those richest individuals and companies who are most able to pay.

9. Finally, we /demand Africa Union maintain the 2022 theme for another three years, as food and nutrition issues require midterm consistent national governments commitments' and actions and to strengthen the platform for consultations with Civil Society.

