

Africa needs to explore opportunities across the food chain to create enough jobs for youth

While agriculture will continue to create employment in Africa for years to come, opportunities throughout the food chain should be explored to create enough jobs for young people, especially those in rural areas, according to FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva. He made the remarks at FAO's Regional Conference for Africa which is primarily dedicated to the theme of creating decent and attractive employment in the continent - the world's "youngest" in terms of its average age of its population.



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He added that countries need to promote a rural and structural transformation that fosters synergies between farm and non-farm activities and that reinforces the linkages between rural areas and cities - including processing, packaging, transportation, distribution, marketing and service provision, especially financial and business services.

Going beyond farm jobs

Estimates suggest that up to 12 million new jobs will have to be created every year to absorb new labour market entrants over the next 20 years. Today some 54% of Africa's working force relies on the agricultural sector for livelihoods, income and employment, especially in family farming.

With more people moving to cities, demand on urban food markets will grow, which in turn can generate job opportunities in all agriculture-related activities. But FAO believes that more must be done to create non-agricultural employment in rural areas, including agro-tourism and other services.

Graziano da Silva pointed to FAO's regional programme, [Youth Employment: enabling decent agriculture and agribusiness jobs](#), which goes beyond farm jobs and seeks to develop capacity and scale up successful approaches through programme formulation and partnerships.

"More than ever, strategic partnerships are needed to bring together the African Union, the African Development Bank and the UN system and other development partners," the FAO director-general said. F

warned, however, that more profitable urban markets can lead to a concentration of food production in large commercial farms, and also the creation of value chains dominated by large processors and retailers.

"In this contest, smallholders and family farmers need specific policies and regulations. This includes providing access to inputs, credit and technology and improving land tenure," Graziano da Silva added, stressing how social protection programmes, including cash transfers, can link public food purchase to family farmer's production.

Hunger, overweight and obesity

Achieving Zero Hunger remains FAO's highest priority, one that it shares with African leaders who through the [Malabo Declaration](#) have committed to eradicating chronic undernourishment in their continent by 2025. In sub-Saharan Africa almost one person in four currently suffers from undernourishment.

In his address, Graziano da Silva underscored that in line with [Sustainable Development Goal 2](#), achieving Zero Hunger needs to go together with ending all forms of malnutrition, a consequence of which is the current global overweight and obesity epidemic. "The situation is also worrisome here in Africa," Graziano Silva said, citing a World Health Organization estimate that obesity-related diseases may become the biggest killer in Africa by 2030.



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Rapid urbanisation and consumption of highly processed foods are the major drivers behind the increase in overweight and obesity. Yet many people in Africa are unaware that certain foods are unhealthy, or that being overweight presents a health risk, the FAO director-general said. He urged for the need to "act on two fronts: focusing on both the production and consumption of healthy food and called for ensuring more responsible advertising and information campaigns on food products. "People must be aware of the pros and cons of what they are eating, and also be encouraged to eat healthy food."

Green Climate Fund

Graziano da Silva also referred to climate change and other pressing issues in Africa and how FAO, together with its partners, is addressing them. FAO is working closely with a wide range of countries around the world that have formally requested the organisation's assistance to tap into financing from the [Green Climate Fund](#). In Africa to date, FAO is currently supporting the development of six full project proposals - Benin, Gambia, Kenya, Republic of Congo and Tanzania - several other "readiness" proposals.

More funds needed to tackle Fall armyworm

Africa is particularly affected and vulnerable to climate change, which is contributing to increasing outbreak of pests and diseases, with Fall armyworm - which was first reported on the continent in 2016 and has now spread rapidly to almost all Sub-Saharan countries - being a case in point, the FAO director-general said. Fall armyworm - whose moths can fly up to 100km per night - primarily affects maize, but also rice and sorghum as well as cotton and some vegetables.

FAO has been on the front line in responding to the Fall armyworm threat and recently launched a step-by-

step guide for farmers on how to deal with this transboundary pest.



AGRICULTURE

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FAO has also developed a mobile app called FAMEWS which allows farmers to detect, monitor and track the spread of Fall armyworm directly in their fields. FAMEWS has already being used in Madagascar, Sou Africa and Zambia before it is deployed in the rest of Africa by the end of February.

Endorsed by the African Union, the FAO Programme for Action on Fall armyworm, aims to leverage much needed funding, Graziano da Silva said. "So far we have raised \$13m. FAO has contributed to \$10m from its own budget. But we need much more."

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