

# Conference Report

Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2023

sef:

## Food Security in Africa in Times of Global Crises – Regional Strategies Against Hunger and Dependency

Nora Witt

**Russia's war in Ukraine has sent transport and trade costs soaring worldwide and is one of the drivers of the dramatic increase in food prices. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa are particularly impacted by these developments. For millions of people, this new crisis threatens to further destabilise an already precarious food supply. At this year's Potsdam Spring Dialogues, African and European experts discussed how to make nutritious food available and affordable for all, how successful the various proposed solutions are likely to be, and how governments, international and regional organisations, the private sector and civil society can make a contribution.**

### Long-term strengthening of food security in Africa

Although the global food system theoretically produces enough food for everyone, people are still going hungry, especially in low-income countries. The current figures indicate that the international community is likely to miss its target of ending hunger by 2030. Unless we take action now, "there is a real risk that we will still be talking about food insecurity in 100 years' time," said Dr Vongai Murugani, a researcher at Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

The highest proportion of people facing food insecurity live in Africa. In the past, progress towards

ending hunger on a broad scale in Africa has often been cancelled out by crises or emergencies, with the result that some regions have been reliant on food aid for decades, as the speaker made clear.

Dr Murugani identified high food prices, climate change and long-running conflicts as key drivers of food insecurity. Making matters worse, many



Vongai Murugani from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

farmers have no formal rights of ownership over the land they cultivate – a legacy of the colonial era that negatively affects agricultural production to this day.

In her analysis, Dr Murugani offered a nuanced picture of the food situation in various regions. North African countries are particularly impacted by the crisis-related disruption of supply chains, weak national currencies and high food prices, whereas the interaction of climate change and political instability presents additional challenges for food systems in West Africa. In East Africa, armed conflicts and, again, the impacts of climate change adversely affect food security. This region is increasingly experiencing long-lasting droughts that wipe out farmers' livestock herds and harvests. Food insecurity in the countries of Southern and Central Africa is also caused by frequent droughts, but extreme weather events and macroeconomic decline are other factors that have a bearing here. Numerous countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, are thus affected by chronic food insecurity.



First panel round with Karin Gaesing, H.E. Tom Amolo, Angelika Spelten (Chair), Alec Thornton and Daniel Duke Odongo (l.t.r.)

Despite this bleak scenario, the international community can achieve lasting improvements in food security if the right measures are put in place. Above all, this will require a willingness to invest in African food systems in order to build their productivity and resilience. A holistic approach which effectively addresses the complex causes of food insecurity should focus particularly on women in rural regions and the mainly young African population and work with local farmers to make targeted use of available resources, as Dr Murugani underlined.

## Session I: Agricultural strategies against food insecurity, poverty and dependency

The research community and policy-makers are proposing various solutions to build resilience in African food systems, including measures aimed at modernising agriculture through digital technologies, appropriate use of fertilisers and strengthening intra-African trade.

The first panel of the day, with Dr Alec Thornton, a Climate-Migration-Conflict Research Analyst at Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), H.E. Tom Amolo, Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya, Dr Karin Gaesing, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF), and Daniel Odongo, Program Management Specialist at Ushahidi, a not-for-profit company in Nairobi, identified and discussed the challenges that must be overcome in order to strengthen food systems on a sustainable basis.

Food insecurity is a multidimensional problem which cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader institutional frameworks given that corruption and political conflicts are steadily eroding progress on combating food insecurity, Dr Thornton explained. Climate change is a particular challenge as it acts as a multiplier, amplifying the diverse causes of food insecurity. Climate migration is noticeably increasing, particularly in regions where large numbers of people are dependent on agriculture. However, many people cannot afford to migrate. The situation is especially precarious for those who are left behind in rural regions where there are no alternative income-generating opportunities outside agriculture, he said.

Five steps are pivotal in sustainably improving smallholder resilience, according to Dr Gaesing. She identified the following as key prerequisites: (1) access to land and long-term tenure. Socio-cultural aspects and gender issues must also be considered in this context. Long-term stability is essential to enable farmers to invest. Investment in (2) soil and water conservation measures is critical to preserve soil fertility in the long term and (3) improve land use without extending the cultivation area. She emphasised that a holistic approach is urgently needed to (4) integrate smallholders into value chains and (5) strengthen the infrastructure, both physical (roads, markets, water supply) and social (health, education, financial system), in rural regions.

H.E. Ambassador Amolo emphasised that a bottom-up approach is urgently required and that there must be a much stronger focus on determin-

ing which best practices are already in place. These practices must then be coordinated more effectively in order to make targeted use of available resources. Motivating young people to take an interest in agriculture is a particular challenge. Young farmers must be visible in order to encourage engagement by their peers. And in the debate about food security, there should be a stronger focus on nutrition. It is also important to rethink the terminology: the phrase “climate change” does not adequately capture the situation. In order to underline the urgency, we should be talking about a “climate crisis”, as Ambassador Amolo made clear.

Besides more frequent droughts, the climate crisis is associated with a rise in new challenges, including novel diseases and pests, as Mr Odongo explained. As an example, he mentioned the Fall Armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*), which can rapidly destroy thousands of hectares of maize, sorghum and other staple foods. Early warning systems are therefore urgently required and must be



Panelround with Roman Herre, Yeboua Kouassi, Bettina Rudloff, Teniola T. Tayo and Chair Marcus Kaplan (l.t.r.)

accessible to local people, so Ushahidi works with local communities and enables them to learn from their neighbours’ experience. Local knowledge and local contexts are often ignored both in research and in the implementation of climate change mitigation measures such as afforestation projects. Solutions cannot be developed in large conference rooms, said Mr Odongo. “We should be asking people what kind of support they need.”

## Session II: Shifting geopolitical context – How national and international responses to global crises impact on food security

The second panel – Dr Yeboua Kouassi, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in Pretoria, Dr Bettina Rudloff, Senior Associate at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Teniola T. Tayo, Trade Policy Fellow at the Africa Policy Research Institute (APRI), and Roman Herre, Agrarian Advisor at the human rights organisation FIAN Deutschland e.V. – looked at the impacts of the geopolitical context on food security in Africa and discussed ways to strengthen resilience in the global food system.

For Africa, world trade offers opportunities to improve the food supply and living conditions and stimulate the development of the agricultural sector through agricultural technology transfer, said Dr Kouassi. Africa is the only continent where the number of undernourished people has increased over the last 35 years. A combination of factors – including a lack of political will, underinvestment, conflicts, climate change and a shortage of productivity-boosting technologies – means that the food needs of the growing African population cannot be met from domestic production. As a result, Africa is highly dependent on food imports. Furthermore, the stability of world trade has wavered in recent years. Trump’s trade war with China, the COVID-19 pandemic and now the war in Ukraine have undermined the multilateral trade system with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its centre. Export restrictions, supply chain disruptions and rising grain and energy prices are the result. For the African continent, the growing geopolitical tensions pose a major threat due to its heavy reliance on imports of seed, fertiliser and grain. Increasing fragmentation of world trade will therefore further destabilise food security in Africa and worsen the problem of malnutrition. Efforts to improve the situation must focus on both the national and the international level, Dr Kouassi said. Countries should be aware that trade restrictions on food are self-destructive as they decrease the global supply and increase food prices. In his view, food and fertilisers should therefore be exempt from trade sanctions. He saw the comprehensive implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement as an opportunity to improve Africa’s food security.

As regards the global food situation, the crises that have occurred in recent years, foremost among them Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, have led to a resurgence in the use of resource-related power

to exert political pressure, according to Dr Rudloff. Due to the loss of grain supplies from Russia and Ukraine, combined with the discord over the grain deal, food security is now firmly on the global political agenda. As a result of the conflict, the security of the food supply has emerged as an issue in global foreign and security policy for the first time.



World Café on the impact of colonialism

Mr Herre pointed out in this context that the global food crisis had already begun before COVID-19 and the Russian invasion. Even in productive years with unrestricted world trade, the number of hungry people increased worldwide; indeed, countries whose food production far exceeds their domestic requirements, such as Zambia, are often unable to guarantee food security for their own people. This shows that the debate should not focus solely on the volume of production as there is not always a direct correlation between production and security. At the international level, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) has a key role to play in combating global hunger. Its mandate, namely to coordinate the work of the UN institutions and develop workable policy recommendations, is clear. However, the CFS is not an implementing organisation. The responsibility for taking up the CFS's recommendations lies with the member states. As these recommendations are fairly progressive, they often meet with considerable resistance and ultimately have no effect, as Mr Herre made clear.

Ms Tayo agreed with Dr Kouassi and emphasised that the AfCFTA has proved its worth as a key mechanism for increasing food security in Africa. The free trade area promotes intra-African trade in agricultural products, strengthens regional value chains and helps to improve infrastructure. In Ms Tayo's view, the AfCFTA has the potential to build the African food systems' resilience to external shocks and foster continent-wide technology transfer and knowledge-sharing. In order to achieve these objectives, it is essential to dismantle

non-tariff barriers and other trade restrictions. Although the initiative to promote intra-African trade was launched long before the current supply crisis, the latest crises have strengthened the initiative and focused Africa's attention on the need to build its own resilience.

---

### Session III: Networking in the World Café

The afternoon of Day 1 was an opportunity for the participants to come together at three sessions of the World Café for a sharing of views in a trustful atmosphere. Group 1 discussed various measures aimed at curbing price increases, with a focus on the recommendations made by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Group 2 critically examined the impacts of colonialism and structural power relations, while Group 3 considered the use of digital resources such as feature phones and discussed potential benefits and risks.



World Café on the role of the Committee on World Food Security CFS

---

### Session IV: Making agriculture and food systems sustainable and equitable – strategies from the European and the African Union

The panel discussion on Day 2 of the conference focused on relations between the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU). The panel – Dr Jakkie Cilliers, Head of Programme at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in Pretoria, Dr Leonard Mizzi, Head of Unit, Sustainable Agri-Food Systems and Fisheries, in the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), Dr Koen Dekeyser, Policy Officer at the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), and Francisco Marí, Senior

Policy Officer at Brot für die Welt – shed light on some of the main approaches and policy measures adopted by the AU and EU to improve the food supply in Africa and discussed their impacts.

At the start of the session, Dr Cilliers pointed out that all the forecasts currently indicate that Africa's food import dependency will continue to increase. Large numbers of people on the continent still live in poverty, one reason being that Africa has never undergone an agricultural revolution. As Dr Mizzi



Panel session (l.t.r.) with Koen Dekeyser, Angelika Spelten (Chair) and Francisco Mari; Jakkie Cilliers and Leonard Mizzi were connected via Zoom

confirmed, this presents the African countries with major challenges. Within the Global Gateway framework, the EU aims to address this dependency and boost production in Africa, he said. In order to increase the African countries' autonomy, it is essential to strengthen intra-African trade and create integrated markets. A sustainable impact can only be achieved if more states in Africa enter into dialogue with European countries. As Dr Mizzi made clear, this is also a governance issue.

Dr Dekeyser mentioned, as a point for consideration, that the dialogue between the AU and the EU invariably tails off in the intervals between the EU-AU summits. The EU member states are still the main donors in the context of development cooperation, but the level of need greatly exceeds the resources provided. The situation has worsened due to the coincidence of multiple crises. Granted, Africa is a priority for the EU, but Ukraine is a top priority. Whether and to what extent the EU responds to multiple crises and balances its programmes is a credibility issue. On a critical note, Dr Dekeyser said that some member states are too slow to recognise Africa as an equal partner.

Mr Mari was gratified that the EU had dropped its claim to be responsible for feeding Africa and its belief that it could solve the food crisis from European overproduction. His criticism, however, was that all too often, global hunger is utilised by agricultural interest groups as an opportunity to step up production on marginal land. He also pointed out that it is fundamentally wrong to depict Africa as the hungry continent, given that African farmers are managing to feed as much as 80% of the population. Import dependency has been falling over the last seven years, but needs to be further reduced and the continent urgently requires export markets. Nevertheless, the EU is still the world's largest agricultural exporter; European exports of goods such as milk, meat and grain impede the development of local production systems in Africa. Mr Mari therefore called for a significant increase in investment in the development of value chains and, above all, for more to be done to establish fair trade relations between the AU and the EU. Europe's agricultural policy must be coherently aligned with its trade and development policies, he said.

### Session V: The role of China and Russia in Africa and the global food market

In light of the current geopolitical tensions, Professor Lixia Tang from China Agricultural University and Dr Linde Götz from Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO) provided an overview of the role of China and Russia in the global food market.

For the Chinese government, global food security is of overriding importance, said Professor Tang. Alongside China's engagement in international dialogue formats such as the International Forum



Lively discussion in the plenary

on Hybrid Rice Assistance and Global Food Security, a notable example is the Chinese proposal for a global development initiative that has food security as one of its work priorities. In Africa, China focuses mainly on supporting countries' efforts to build agricultural production capacity, especially small-holder capacity. Technical cooperation on this issue was set up within the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and includes the establishment of demonstration centres for agricultural technologies. The emphasis is on affordable technologies that are accessible to as many people as possible. In order to minimise the risks to food security over the long term, China believes it is essential to adapt cultivation systems and structures to local conditions. Tangible successes achieved within the framework of this cooperation, according to Professor Tang, can be seen in projects such as "Small Technology, Big Harvest" in the Tanzanian province of Morogoro, where there has been a threefold increase in local maize yields. In response to the question whether there are any initiatives for cooperation between China and the EU, Professor Tang pointed out that China is very willing to engage in coop-



Interview with Linde Götz with Marcus Kaplan

eration and has much to learn from agricultural projects such as those implemented by GIZ, particularly with regard to sustainability and environmental issues. China has made mistakes here in the past and is therefore increasingly seeking to learn lessons from local communities in Africa.

Dr Götz explained that food was not typically one of Russia's main export goods in the past; Rus-

sia has only emerged as the world's largest wheat exporter within the past two decades, having previously been an importer of wheat. A notable feature is that Russia only exports to friendly countries. For many African countries that are major importers of Russian grain, this is a very good reason to avoid taking a stand on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Some countries, particularly in North Africa, are highly dependent on food imports, not only from Russia but also from Ukraine. However, most countries' imports of wheat from both Russia and Ukraine have declined since the war began. Countries such as Egypt and Sudan are exceptions: they maintain close political links with Russia and their imports have actually increased. In 14 sub-Saharan countries, imports from Russia are now at a complete standstill, with supplies coming instead from France, Bulgaria, Argentina and Brazil, largely compensating for the drop in imports. With regard to supply security, however, the problem is food price inflation, rather than the general availability of food, reflecting the fact that the risks in the global grain trade have increased considerably. Above all, the fear that Russia could weaponise the grain supply and suspend the Russia-Ukraine grain deal has sent global grain prices soaring. Food insecurity in Africa is therefore directly linked to the invasion of Ukraine, but is mainly related to the high prices rather than to the suspension of supplies.

The two-day discussion in Potsdam clearly demonstrated that the knowledge, strategies and technologies needed to bring about a sustainable improvement in the food situation in African countries have been available for decades. It is essential to consider local contexts, safeguard long-term land tenure, take decisive action on climate change, preserve biodiversity, promote rural infrastructures, reduce dependencies and strengthen intra-African trade. However, there is an obvious funding gap and – in the Global North and the Global South alike – a lack of political will to implement these measures. Unless we want to be talking about these issues in a century's time, to echo Dr Murugani's comment at the start of the conference, we must take urgent action to make change happen. The crises that have occurred in recent years should be seen by all stakeholders as an opportunity to initiate structural changes that offer potential to improve the food situation in Africa on a sustainable and long-term basis.

More information on the Potsdam Spring Dialogues conference series is available here: <https://www.sef-bonn.org/de/veranstaltungen/potsdamer-fruehjahrs-gespraech/2023>.



View of the conference hall at the Potsdam Spring Talks, from the technical side

## Cooperating partners



The Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) was founded in 1986 on the initiative of Willy Brandt. As a cross-party and non-profit-making organisation, the sef: provides an international high-level forum for shared thinking on urgent peace and development issues.

The reports on the conferences and events of the Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) provide information about the discussions and results in a compact form.

**Published by**  
Development and Peace Foundation (sef:)/  
Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden (sef:)  
Dechenstr. 2 : 53115 Bonn : Germany  
Phone +49 (0)228 959 25-0 : Fax -99  
sef@sef-bonn.org : [@sefbonn](https://twitter.com/sefbonn)  
www.sef-bonn.org

**Editor**  
Nora Witt

**Translation**  
Constance Prehl

**Basic Design Concept**  
Pitch Black Graphic Design  
Berlin/Rotterdam

**Layout**  
Gerhard Süß-Jung

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher.

© sef: 2023