

AU priority to combat child malnutrition

African Union maps out implementation plan of the continent's nutrition strategy as Africa's children are at the highest risk of malnutrition globally.



Image by 123RF

The 8th session of the African Union (AU) Task Force on Food and Nutrition Development (ATFFND) Meeting has taken place at the commission's headquarters in Addis Ababa. The meeting was partly meant to review progress made in scaling up nutrition interventions in Africa and map out ways for effective implementation of the revised Africa's Regional Nutrition Strategy (ARNS 2016 – 2025), which was adopted in June 2015 by the AU Executive Council.

Speaking on behalf of the director of social affairs of the AU Commission (AUC), Dr Djoudalbaye Benjamin, noted that, in addition to outlining the priority interventions for nutritional improvements in Africa, the ARNS 2016-2025 draws inspiration from past and present declarations, policies and programs to position better nutrition as a critical component for achieving the broader development aspirations of this continent.

He expressed the displeasure of the commission that Africa's children are the ones at highest risk of malnutrition globally, and emphasised the urgent need to address this situation in order to safeguard the future of this continent.

"This strategy, together with other policies, roadmaps and frameworks as well as the ensuing political commitments to agriculture, food security and nutrition in Africa, leaves us with no excuse, but to work earnestly to improve the situation for

all Africans,” Benjamin noted.

He applauded the expertise and continuous contribution of this task force to the development of continental and regional policy instruments and programs, and thanked participants for the support provided to the advocacy role of the AU Nutrition Champion, His Majesty King Letsie III of the Kingdom of Lesotho, which has contributed immensely to raising awareness and profile of nutrition as a development agenda in Africa.

In her statement, the president of the Federation of African Nutrition Societies, Professor Joyce Kinabo, appealed to the AU Commission and member states to enhance resilience of food systems on the continent by integrating climate change mitigation and adaptation approaches into the continents policies and programs. She stressed that, improving the food and nutrition situation of Africa is the responsibility of all and deserves the right amount of commitment and resources from policy makers.

Task force

Speaking on behalf of the UN Agencies, the deputy director of WFP office to the AU and UNECA, Wanja Kaaria pointed out that the consequences of poor nutrition on human development, especially poor child growth and brain development, is evident almost everywhere in Africa. She therefore called on the commission to urge African governments to speed up efforts to address the situation by putting in place the right interventions that touch all those in need.

She described this task force as a forum of global and continental interest for consolidating and harmonising Africa's efforts for better nutrition.

A representative of the RECs also called for strengthening of data and monitoring mechanisms and effective reporting on our activities, to ensure accountability of all the decisions and declarations taken to improve food and nutrition situation of Africans.

During the two-day deliberation, participants called for generating more evidence and knowledge management; advocacy and awareness raising campaigns and increased resources for agriculture, food and nutrition actions. Participants were also briefed on ongoing continental approaches to improve the situation, including the AU-led Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control (PACA), Home Grown School Feeding initiative and the AU Research Grant on Sustainable Agriculture Intensification and Food and Nutrition Security.

The meeting concluded with a consensus on the need for the AU Commission to continuously provide guidance and actively lead the coordination and harmonisation of policies and programs that support better nutritional outcomes in Africa. The Meeting called on the Commission to put in place a comprehensive continental campaign against elimination of child stunting in Africa; and clear accountability mechanisms for tracking implementations of the numerous decisions, declarations, policies, strategies and frameworks on Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security.

Participants for the meeting were drawn from AU Member States, NEPAD, UN Agencies, civil society organisations, private sector agencies, research institutions, African nutrition societies and associations and individual experts. This Task Force was established in 1987 by the Organisation of African Unity with a mandate to guide and support food and nutrition policies and programs in Africa.

Senegal has agreed in principle to host the nutrition task force meeting in 2017.