









KAMPALA POLICY BRIEF SERIES

Increasing Preparedness and Responsiveness to Food Crises: The Food System Crisis Observatory and Response (FS-COR) Platform Use in Africa

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Editorial

Since its adoption by the African Union (AU) in 2003, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) has been Africa's primary policy framework for agricultural transformation, wealth creation, food security, economic growth, and prosperity. It guides the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and Member States in driving agricultural transformation toward a self-reliant and productive Africa.

The recently adopted Kampala CAADP Declaration on "Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems in Africa" and the associated CAADP Strategy and Action Plan (2026-2035) will build on the success and deepen the progress achieved after two decades of CAADP implementation, during which Africa significantly improved in economic and agricultural growth, poverty reduction, nutrition outcomes, and agricultural trade expansion. The next 10-year cycle of CAADP implementation must further deepen its focus to incorporate lessons while responding to emerging issues to accelerate sustainable food system transformation within a context of climate change and multifaceted stressors and shocks.

The longevity and continued success of CAADP can be attributed to its credibility as a shared framework designed to guide Member States toward agricultural transformation and economic growth. Driven by the CAADP principles and values, with emphasis on African ownership and mutual accountability, alongside review and benchmarking, data and analytics have been central to CAADP's evidence-based planning and implementation approach. As Africa prepares for the implementation phase of the Kampala CAADP Declaration, which comes into force on January 1, 2026, evidence and robust data analysis will continue to remain indispensable to the successful implementation on the ground. This is the rationale behind AKADEMIYA2063's *Kampala Policy Brief Series*.

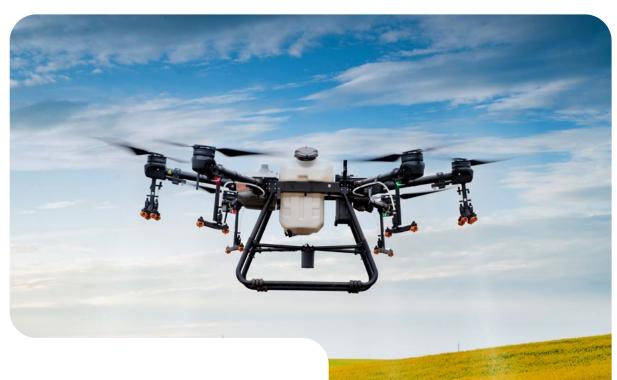
The purpose of the policy briefs is to serve as reference documents for policy analysts and planners across AU Member States as they prepare their programs in response to the Kampala CAADP Declaration. The policy briefs will provide a synthesis of a large body of research tackling topics of strategic relevance to Africa's development agenda in parallel with key issues to be addressed during the new phase of CAADP implementation to provide insights, analyze emerging ideas, review crosscutting thematic areas, and propose policy recommendations that can be replicated for sustainable impact.

The evidence presented in the Kampala Policy Brief Series is derived from published research and data by AKADEMIYA2063's scientists and collaborators across Africa and outside the continent. These lessons are made accessible to policymakers, non-state actors, and other practitioners at continental, regional, and national levels, as well as development partners, to support the implementation of CAADP 2026-2035. In addition to packaging the lessons and insights into comprehensive yet accessible knowledge products, AKADEMIYA2063 is facilitating policy dialogue through webinars. During these sessions, the findings are presented to a broad range of stakeholders to guide programmatic interventions supporting the implementation of the Kampala CAADP Agenda.



his brief presents an innovative approach to assessing underlying patterns of vulnerability and nutrient adequacy to strengthen efforts for preparedness and responsiveness to crises. Africa's food systems face growing threats from climate change, conflict, economic shocks, and weak infrastructure. For example, the 2023–2024 El Niño, compounded by broader systemic issues, has deepened food insecurity in countries like Malawi. To support better preparedness and response to food crises, AKADEMIYA2063 developed the Food System Crisis Observatory and Response

(FS-COR) platform to identify high-risk communities and assess the potential impacts of shocks on their nutritional status. This brief applies FS-COR to Malawi, showing how El Niño-related drought led to crop failures, food price spikes, and declines in dietary quality. The tool provides critical insights for targeting interventions, improving resilience, and guiding nutrition-sensitive policy design. Already operational in five countries, FS-COR is a tool that policymakers, humanitarian agencies, and other stakeholders can apply to make more sound decisions and, in doing so, contribute to better resilience to shocks.



Introduction

Africa, interlinked factors, including political instability and related population displacement, the impact of weather extremes such as disrupted food systems, limited food production, barriers to regional trade, ineffective policy choices, and the continued socioeconomic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to food crises with devastating impacts on food security and nutrition in many countries. In addition, the war in Ukraine has worsened the situation, leading to increased and volatile prices for food and other commodities. More importantly, the impacts of the shrinking ODA and the evolving aid landscape—particularly on climate change and health-related interventions—will require stakeholders (governments and partners) to be even more deliberate in how they allocate their resources.

While the 2014 Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Property and Improved Livelihoods included a commitment to enhance resilience to climate variability, the Kampala CAADP Strategy and Action Plan for 2026-2035 recognizes the importance of increased resilience on a broader level for Africa's sustained growth and development. Building resilience is essential for adapting to and recovering from shocks, including climate change, pandemics, conflicts, and economic disruptions. Despite some progress, Africa is struggling to enhance resilience, with only two countries on track to meet the Malabo Declaration's climate resilience goals as of the 2023 Biennial Review (van den Berg 2025). The slow progress in building resilience and reducing vulnerability undermines other goals, such as ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition, and reducing poverty. Despite efforts made in several countries, the African continent is not on track to meet the food security and nutrition targets of Sustainable Development Goal 2 on Zero Hunger by 2030. The latest estimates indicate that nearly 282 million people in Africa—approximately 20 percent of the continent's population—were undernourished in 2022 (FAO et al. 2023). Additionally, around 868 million people experienced moderate or severe food insecurity, with over one-third of them (342 million) facing severe food insecurity (FAO et al. 2023).

Widespread suffering and the destruction of livelihoods should not be the inevitable outcome of every shock—whether climatic, health-related, or socioeconomic—particularly for national and community leaders. It is both imperative and achievable for governments to design and implement effective strategies that enhance preparedness and strengthen the response capacity of vulnerable communities. This calls for deliberate, sustained action during stable periods to address the root causes of vulnerabilityandensuremore targeted, effective interventions when crises arise. In response to this urgent need, AKADEMIYA2063 launched the Food System Crisis Observatory and Response (FS-COR) platform in 2023 to support African governments and other stakeholders, including those engaged in humanitarian and development actions, in building the capacity required to better anticipate, manage, and recover from food system shocks. FS-COR is an analytical tool designed to generate knowledge for devising and implementing effective measures to enhance resilience and respond effectively to shocks. Its goal is to create the necessary capacities to: (i) better understand the nature of disruptions associated with various shocks; (ii) have a clear course of action to restore normalcy; and (iii) create the tools and mechanisms to intervene when and where needed.

The FS-COR proposal builds on what is referred to as the Snowplow Principle (Badiane 2024). In some countries of the Global North,

municipalities typically know in advance where to position snowplows before a storm hits, based on a clear understanding of which neighborhoods will be most affected. Snowplows are strategically stationed to minimize disruptions in areas where traffic and daily life are most vulnerable. Similarly, governments in Africa must strive for this level of proactive preparedness when it comes to crises, whether they are driven by drought, floods, or market shocks, by identifying and implementing appropriate responses. For example, if vulnerability is driven by marginal environments with low agricultural productivity and nutrient-poor crops, interventions should focus on promoting better farming practices and improving access to nutrient-dense crop varieties. Likewise, if vulnerability is due to limited access to infrastructure or markets, those structural deficiencies must be addressed during times of stability—before crises emerge.

This brief provides an overview of the FS-COR approach as a tool to guide decisions in the food system and its application in the case of the impact of El Niño on nutrition in Malawi through local commodity price changes. Following this introductory section, the second section will show how the FS-COR tool can be applied to examining subnational patterns of vulnerability and nutrient adequacy and provide an overview of the platform. The third section will demonstrate how the approach of FS-COR can be applied and extended to anticipate potential impacts of crises by presenting a case study of the impacts of El Niño on nutrient adequacy in Malawi. The last section concludes and provides recommendations.

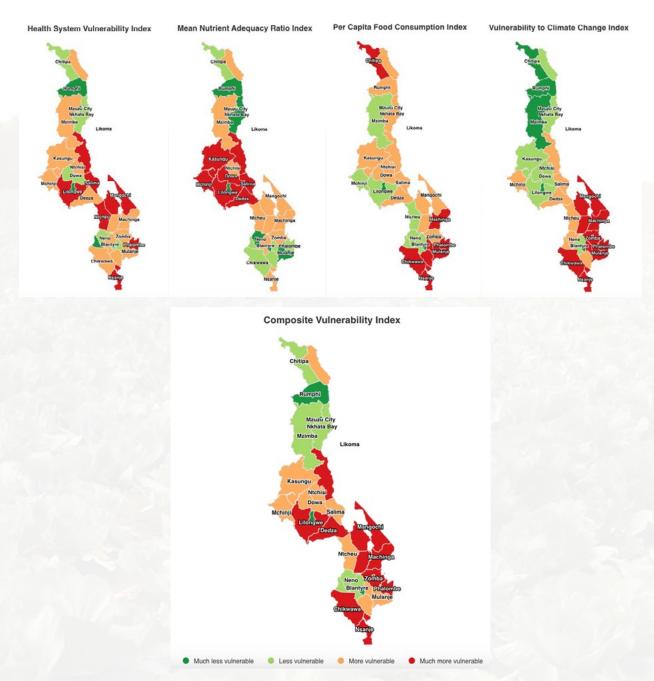
1. Food System Crisis Observatory and Response (FS-COR): Approach

FS-COR has two components: multidimensional vulnerability and nutrient adequacy, and the main impact pathways assumed are prices and income. The vulnerability component relies on a composite vulnerability index (CVI) that captures the patterns and long-term drivers of vulnerability. CVI covers dimensions of food and nutrition security, access to health services and infrastructure, and vulnerability to climate shocks.

To construct the CVI, a set of four sub-indices based on household survey data is first developed: food security vulnerability, based household food expenditures; health systems vulnerability, based on indicators of access to health services and health infrastructure; mean nutrient adequacy, based on a summary measure of nutrient consumption adequacy; and climate change vulnerability, based on indicators of households' exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity to climate shocks. The sub-indices are calculated at the subnational level and then combined to calculate the composite index. For the sub-indices as well as for the CVI, each area of a given country is classified as "much more", "more", "less", or "much less" vulnerable than the national average. Thus, the CVI and its sub-indices do not attempt to define whether a region is vulnerable or not on a binary level but rather recognize that degrees of vulnerability differ across a country and that identifying relative levels of vulnerability can permit more nuanced responses to crises. The FS-COR platform presents maps of each sub-index as well as the combined CVI. Maps for Malawi are presented in Figure 1.1

¹ It should be noted that the approach is customizable to different countries with varying contexts and levels of data availability. The indicators used to develop the CVI were selected based on broad applicability and availability, but additional indicators can be applied in individual countries depending on need.

Figure 1. Composite vulnerability index and sub-indexes for Malawi.

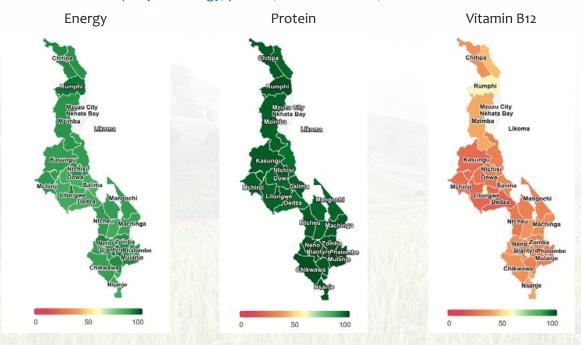


Source: FS-COR platform.

FS-COR's nutrient adequacy component allows for assessing whether, when, and to what extent livelihoods in affected communities have recovered and normalcy has been restored based on the Micronutrient Adequacy Gap indicator (MAG) developed by AKADEMIYA2063. MAG is a comprehensive indicator allowing for measuring and tracking short-term changes in household livelihood status. The indicator reflects several livelihood dimensions among target communities, such as poverty, disease prevalence, access to services, and environmental degradation, among others. It is, therefore, closely aligned with the earlier composite vulnerability indicator but is more amenable to short-run changes and thus suitable for tracking responses to emergency interventions. The indicator measures the degree of adequacy of household intake of key micronutrients compared to recommended levels, using household consumption survey data. More specifically, it provides information on nutritional adequacy for energy (calorie intake), protein, and key micronutrients,

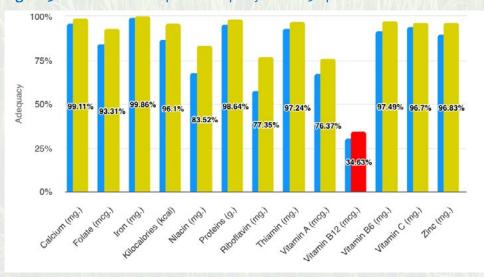
including calcium, iron, zinc, folate, vitamin A, vitamin B12, vitamin C, riboflavin, niacin, and thiamin.² Areas of the country with the most significant nutrient gaps can be located on the maps (Figure 2). FS-COR also displays the main food sources of each nutrient for each area. In addition, the platform uses a simulation model linking the need for nutrients to household incomes and food prices to allow users to simulate the impact of price and income changes on nutrient adequacy (Figure 3). Impacts of cash transfers and food price subsidies as mitigation measures can be simulated.

Figure 2. Nutrient adequacy for energy, protein, and Vitamin B12, Malawi.



Source: FS-COR platform.

Figure 3. Nutrient consumption adequacy after a 50 percent increase in income, Mangochi district.



Source: FS-COR platform.

MAG also provides targeted guidance in designing resilience-building programs that would boost local production and intake of micronutrients during normal times.

² Further methodological details on the estimation of nutrient adequacy are provided in Ulimwengu et al. (2023).

2. Nutritional Impact of El Niño in Malawi: FS-COR-based Analysis

The southern African region underwent strong El Niño weather effects from late 2023 through mid-2024. El Niño is a phase in an irregularly periodic variation in winds and sea surface temperatures, resulting in above-average rainfall in some places and droughts in others. These climate variabilities significantly affected agricultural production in southern Africa, leading to food shortages. Maize is the main food crop in Malawi, accounting for over 65 percent of the country's calorie intake. The drought induced by El Niño resulted in reduced production of maize and other rainfed crops. However, our analysis focuses solely on the impacts on the consumer side, while it overlooks the effects of El Niño on the supply side. Specifically, the brief emphasizes the impacts of El Niño on local consumer prices but neglects its potential effects on farm incomes. For this purpose, we used the FS-COR platform, which not only assesses subnational vulnerability and nutrient adequacy patterns but also provides insights into the expected impacts of specific shocks, such as El Niño.

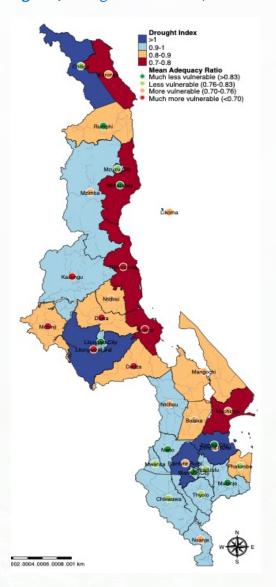
In the following section, we demonstrate the application of the FS-COR approach to analyze the potential impacts of El Niño on nutrient adequacy in Malawi. First, we present Malawi's vulnerability to identify the most vulnerable districts. Second, we use El Niño-induced price changes as inputs to FS-COR to predict their impact on energy and nutrient adequacy across districts.

Using a drought index based on biophysical data, combined with Malawi's mean Nutrient Adequacy Ratio (MAR), a summary measure capturing adequacy of all nutrients measured, this analysis identifies areas that are particularly vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity. By mapping regions with both significant nutrient adequacy gaps and high drought exposure, the vulnerability assessment helps decision makers in targeting areas most in need of support. These are communities with limited capacity to absorb shocks and respond effectively to climate-related stressors. The approach offers practical guidance to policymakers for prioritizing interventions aimed at strengthening resilience, reducing vulnerability over time, and improving preparedness for future droughts and other environmental shocks.

Figure 4 illustrates a diverse range of drought indices and MAR values across Malawi's districts, revealing varying levels of vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity. The drought index quantifies the severity of drought conditions over a specific area. Lower values approaching zero signify more severe drought conditions, while values above 1 indicate no drought presence. Districts such as Balaka, Dedza, Dowa, Mchinji, Kasungu, Nkhotakota, and Salima exhibit higher vulnerability, with drought indices ranging from 0.7 to 0.9 and MAR below 70 percent. This indicates that these areas already face significant challenges in meeting nutritional needs, which risk being exacerbated by moderate drought conditions associated with El Niño.

Conversely, districts such as Blantyre City, Lilongwe City, Mulanje, Neno, Nkhata Bay, Rumphi, and Zomba City show much lower vulnerability, with drought indices between 0.9 and 1 or higher and MAR exceeding 83 percent. These regions appear to have better resilience against drought impacts; they may likely benefit from a combination of stronger infrastructure, more diversified livelihoods, better market access, and targeted nutrition or social protection programs.

Figure 4: Drought Index in 2024 and MAR for Malawi.



Source: Authors' construction, based on Africa Agriculture Watch (AAgWa) and FS-COR.

Nkhata Bay, for instance, despite having high drought indices, demonstrates low vulnerability, suggesting that effective local mitigation strategies, relatively stable economic activities (such as fisheries or tourism), or stronger community-based safety nets might be playing a role. Understanding these underlying resilience factors is critical. Identifying which interventions, institutions, or local practices contribute to greater food and nutrition security could offer valuable lessons that can be adapted and scaled in more vulnerable districts.

2.1 Assessing livelihood change through nutrient adequacy change

This analysis provides evidence on the possible impact of El Niño through the effects of crisis-induced maize price shocks on food security and nutrition in terms of energy and nutrient adequacy. The methodology relies on the estimation of the price change attributable to the crisis and uses the FS-COR tool to simulate the impact. Price changes over previous periods are used as a benchmark for non-crisis years. By comparing the observed prices during the crisis to previous years' prices, a possible change due to the crisis can be estimated.

In this brief, we present the findings from the impact of maize price changes on nutrient adequacy using FS-COR to evidence the usefulness of the tool. This type of ex-ante analysis can also be implemented to assess the anticipated impact of impending shocks among exposed communities and thus foster readiness for action. Figure 5 presents an

interesting pattern in the relationship between maize price changes and changes in consumption of calories and Vitamin B6 across various districts. In fact, Chiradzulu, Mchinji, Mulanje, Phalombe, Salima, Thyolo, and Zomba Rural exhibit an expected decrease in both kilocalorie and Vitamin B6 consumption, with reductions of over 0.1 percent. These declines are paired with notable increases in maize prices, from 1.1 percent to 8.3 percent. This indicates that rising maize prices in these districts may negatively impact nutritional intake, resulting in lower consumption of both calories and Vitamin B6. The increased cost of maize could be making it difficult for residents to afford enough, thereby adversely affecting their overall dietary quality.

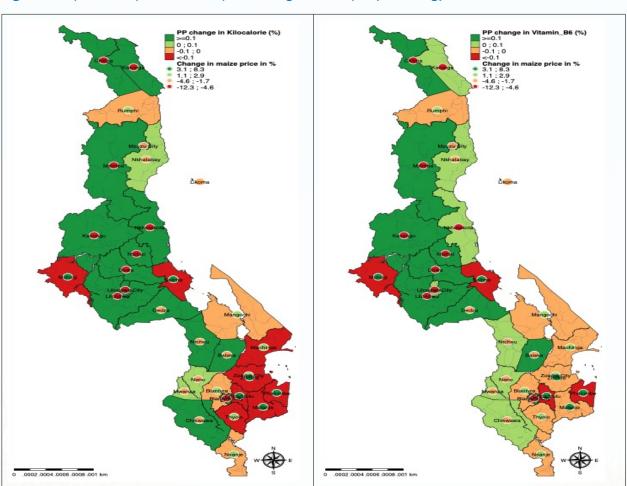


Figure 5: Expected impact of maize price change on adequacy of energy and Vitamin B6.

Source: Authors' construction, based on AAgWa and FS-COR.

However, it is important to note that some districts experienced a decrease in maize prices despite the El Niño event, highlighting the differentiated impact of the crisis. Districts such as Balaka, Blantyre City, Chitipa, Dedza, Dowa, Kasungu, Lilongwe Rural, Mzimba, and Ntchisi recorded significant declines in maize prices, ranging from -12.3 percent to -1.7 percent. This yielded an expected increase in both kilocalorie and Vitamin B6 consumption, with values exceeding 0.1 percent. These findings further confirm the negative correlation between maize prices and the consumption of calories and Vitamin B6. In other words, improved affordability and accessibility of maize—a staple food—appears to facilitate increased intake of both energy and essential nutrients.

Lastly, some districts, such as Likoma, Mwanza, Mzuzu City, Neno, Nkhata Bay, and Nkhotakota, exhibit moderate changes in consumption, with increases ranging from o to 0.1 percent for both kilocalories and Vitamin B6, despite substantial decreases in maize prices. This suggests that while maize price reductions can contribute to improved nutrition, other factors may also influence consumption patterns. The impact of price reductions may be limited in districts where other factors (such as the availability of alternative staple foods, traditional dietary patterns, or relatively higher household incomes) diminish the population's reliance on maize. For instance, in Malawi, some districts may traditionally consume more cassava, rice, or fish, or may fall within higher socioeconomic brackets where food choices are less sensitive to maize price changes.

Overall, the data underscores the importance of maize price stability in ensuring adequate nutritional intake, highlighting how both drastic price increases and decreases can have significant effects on dietary consumption. While it is well known that food price fluctuations impact dietary intake, the strength of FS-COR lies in its ability to anticipate these effects at a granular, district level—before they occur. This is particularly relevant in the context of climate-related shocks, such as El Niño, which can disrupt food production and markets, leading to localized price spikes and nutritional declines.

By using FS-COR as an ex-ante assessment tool, governments can move from reactive to proactive policy planning. For example, if FS-COR predicts that El Niño-related maize price increases will lead to reduced Vitamin B6 and calorie intake in vulnerable districts like Phalombe or Salima, governments could:

- Pre-position food or cash assistance in those districts before prices peak.
- Subsidize maize or alternative nutritious staples in affected areas to stabilize consumption.
- Promote dietary diversification through behavior change campaigns or market incentives, particularly where maize price drops do not improve nutrition.
- Invest in climate-resilient agriculture to reduce future supply shocks.

3. Conclusion

African policymakers, development practitioners, and farmers require capacities and tools to enhance their food system resilience policies and planning. In addressing these challenges, AKADEMIYA2063 has pioneered work toward establishing a Food System Crisis Observatory and Response (FS-COR) Platform. FS-COR is an analytical tool designed to generate knowledge on multidimensional vulnerability and nutrition adequacy. It enables the identification of community vulnerability profiles, helping to locate areas where shocks may have the most severe impacts on well-being. Therefore, FS-COR allows governments and development partners to allocate limited resources more effectively (such as food assistance, cash transfers, nutritional supplements, or agricultural inputs) by prioritizing the most vulnerable communities based on their vulnerability and nutrient adequacy profiles. Crucially, FS-COR also provides detailed nutrient adequacy analyses, supporting the design of targeted nutrition interventions and more informed decision-making. By enabling early and localized insight, FS-COR empowers stakeholders to act proactively, improving food security and nutrition outcomes in the face of ongoing and emerging challenges. Additionally, FS-COR provides a nutrient adequacy analysis of those communities, allowing for targeted nutrition interventions and informed decision-making to improve nutrition outcomes.

The FS-COR tool serves various stakeholders. FS-COR can support policymakers in identifying nutrient gaps and prioritizing the cultivation of nutrient-dense crops in specific regions. By using this information to guide incentives and behavior change campaigns, governments can encourage farmers to grow these crops, improving both marketability and food security. Similarly, development agencies and NGOs, or humanitarian agencies, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), can also leverage FS-COR to enhance the effectiveness of food assistance. By identifying the most nutritionally vulnerable communities and the specific nutrient gaps they face, FS-COR helps ensure that the food provided meets the most pressing nutritional requirements, rather than offering generalized support. Moreover, private sector businesses can leverage insights to develop and promote fortified foods or nutrient-rich products that meet local dietary needs, creating new market opportunities. Furthermore, researchers gain access to data for analyzing trends in nutrient intake, assessing community vulnerabilities, and evaluating the impact of agricultural interventions on nutrition. By integrating these insights, FS-COR serves as a crucial resource for designing

evidence-based policies and strategies that enhance resilience and nutritional outcomes across multiple sectors.

Currently, the tool is operational in five African countries, namely, Benin, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda, and Senegal. More countries will be covered to better meet African needs in terms of data and analytics to boost preparedness and response capacities among the most vulnerable communities.

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ABOUT AKADEMIYA2063

AKADEMIYA2063 is a pan-African non-profit research organization with headquarters in Kigali, Rwanda, and a regional office in Dakar, Senegal.

Inspired by the ambitions of Agenda 2063 and grounded in the recognition of the central importance of strong knowledge and evidence systems, the vision of AKADEMIYA2063 is an Africa with the expertise we need for the Africa we want. This expertise must be responsive to the continent's needs for data and analysis to ensure high-quality policy design and execution. Inclusive, evidence-informed policymaking is key to meeting the continent's development aspirations, creating wealth, and changing livelihoods for the better.

AKADEMIYA2063's overall mission is to create, across Africa and led from its headquarters in Rwanda, state-of-the-art technical capacities to support the efforts by the Member States of the African Union to achieve the key goals of the African Union's Agenda 2063 of transforming national economies to boost growth and prosperity.

Following from its vision and mission, the main goal of AKADEMIYA2063 is to help meet Africa's needs at the continental, regional and national levels in terms of data, analytics, and mutual learning for the effective implementation of Agenda 2063 and the realization of its outcomes by a critical mass of countries. AKADEMIYA2063 strives to meet its goals through programs organized under five strategic areas—policy innovation, knowledge systems, capacity creation and deployment, operational support, data management, digital products, and technology—as well as partnerships and outreach activities. For more information, visit www.akademiya2063.org.



Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems in Africa



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