Around 70 percent of Africans relying on rain-fed farming, meaning hundreds of millions of people will be severely affected by climate-driven droughts, heatwaves, and other natural disasters from frequent droughts to rising sea temperatures, according to a new book presented on Wednesday by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA).

AFSA is the largest network of networks in Africa, with more than 30 network members with a combined potential reach of 200 million Africans. Its membership embraces farmers, indigenous communities, pastoralists, hunters and gatherers, fisherfolk, consumer networks, women and youth networks, faith-based organizations, and civil society organizations.

The publication titled “Building an African Food Policy for Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems” is a comprehensive look at the state of food security in Africa

According to the new findings, African farmers, long viewed as victims, are beginning to implement long-term, sustainable solutions to Africa’s climate crisis. Indeed, they are models that all farmers could learn from.

On the sidelines of the 27th conference of the parties to the United Nations framework convention on climate change – COP27 which is currently taking place in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, AFSA has submitted a position paper that outlines a clear path forward for leaders and policymakers to prioritize climate adaptation through agroecology.

Improved food systems

According to Dr. Million Belay, AFSA General Coordinator and Panel Expert with IPES-Food, ignoring agroecology is ignoring Africa’s farmers and sidelining the planet’s most vulnerable people who are being hit first and worst by the climate crisis.

“Africa could feed itself many times over. But agroecology cannot and must not be overlooked by decision-makers as the most effective means to build resilience and enable small-scale farmers, pastoralists, and fishers to adapt to climate change,” Dr Belay said.

Sena Alouka, Executive Director of Togo’s Young Volunteers for the Environment and Chair of AFSA’s Climate and Agroecology Working Group, emphasized the same

point “Leaders at COP27 must prioritize food systems in Africa’s climate adaptation plans and integrate agroecology into UNFCCC climate negotiations.

“The United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP 27) provides a global opportunity to begin a just transition away from high-emitting industrial agriculture, corporate food system monopolies, and false climate solutions and toward agroecology, food sovereignty, and self-sufficiency,” he said.

It is expected that on the sidelines of COP27, AFSA will present data conveying the urgent need for government climate investment in agroecology and food system efforts.

Latest estimates by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) show that traditional systems of land use, farming practices and cropping patterns in most parts across Africa are all changing as small-scale farmers face growing demands from markets to liberalize trade and to use chemicals to increase production in order feed the growing population.

Strengthening Africa’s resilience

To develop solutions that will address the malnutrition and food security challenges in Africa, climate activists stress the need to understand the diverse food systems in the region and develop particular solutions for each farming system instead of adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

For example, in the Sudano-Sahelian region, estimates show that millets are recommended as the primary crop, suitable for the largest area of land, since they require less moisture, while sorghum is dominant in sub humid and semi-arid southern Africa.

Attempts to grow crops that are not suited to the prevailing ecological conditions will often result in low yields or crop failure, with consequent adverse effects on food security, AFSA warns in its new report.

During ongoing climate talks in Sharm el-Sheikh, AFSA wants ensure negotiations strengthen Africa’s resilience to the climate crisis by integrating agroecology into regional and national climate policy spaces.

Latest reports by FAO indicate that Africa’s food and agriculture sectors are among the most vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change.

It said that the resilience against multiple threats, including climate change, is a key prerequisite for sustainable development, in particular when it comes to the challenge of feeding over 2 billion Africans by 2050.

This article has been published with the support from MESHA/IDRC grant for coverage of COP-27