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U.S.-Africa Engagement to Strengthen Food Security: An African (Union) Perspective

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The State of Food Insecurity in Africa and Underlying Causes

African governments and development partners have significant concerns about the state of food insecurity across the continent. In the last six years, indicators of food insecurity, undernourishment of the population, and stunting among children under five years old, have deteriorated. The third Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) biennial review report¹ released in February 2022 revealed that only one country, Kenya, out of the fifty-five African Union (AU) Member States was on track to meet the CAADP goal of ending hunger by 2025.² Statistics from other organizations give a similar picture: the 2022 report³ on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World indicated that one in five people in Africa (20.2%) faced hunger in 2021. These estimates have increased by millions due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The conflict resulted in reduced wheat exports to Africa, which imports most of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine. Indeed, bolstering Africa's food security is of concern to the United States, and comprises a piece of the U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa. This paper assesses the state of food security in Africa and provides recommendations for strengthening the U.S.-Africa partnership to build resilient food systems in Africa.

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Africa is import-dependent to feed its people, importing about \$35 billion a year in food. This figure is expected to rise to \$110 billion by 2025.⁴ Africa's current population is about 1.4 billion people and is forecast to rise⁵ to at least 2.4 billion by 2050 and grow to 4.2 billion—four times its current size—in the next 100 years. To feed this rapidly growing population, greater emphasis and innovative ways to implement CAADP are needed to build strong and resilient food systems that will ensure food sovereignty for the continent.

There are multiple factors behind Africa's dependency on global markets to assure its food security. First, low agricultural productivity in Africa produces crop yields at 30% of the global average. This disparity stems from low fertilizer application rates, limited access to high quality plant seeds and animal breeds, and other farm-level constraints including limited mechanization and lack of extension and advisory services to farmers. Soils degrade due to continuous cultivation and nutrient mining, especially on smallholder farms that produce over 70% of Africa's food. Second is the rapid population growth on the continent, rising incomes, and an emerging middle class outpacing current productive capacity. Africa's *per capita* food production has been declining partly because the continent's population has been increasing while food production has not kept pace, leading to a widening gap between food production and demand. As such, to feed the rising population, Africa imports more food from global markets. Third, the poor infrastructure connectivity across the continent, particularly lack of reliable transcontinental rail and road networks, inhibits the linkages between food surplus and food deficit countries. Fourth are the exogenous shocks to Africa's food systems, the most recent being the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the desert locust infestation in the Horn of Africa, climate change, and conflicts in various countries in Africa.

Progress, Challenges, and Opportunities to Attain Food Security in Africa

The current status of food insecurity in Africa stems from systemic challenges inherent in Africa's food systems and the exogenous shocks whose negative impacts reinforce each other. One key systemic problem is the underfunding of agriculture by African governments. When African governments adopted CAADP in 2003, they committed to investing 10% of the total public expenditure in agriculture. The Malabo Declaration on *Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods* upheld⁶ this commitment in 2014. However, the third CAADP biennial review report in 2021 revealed that only four countries out of the 51 reporting countries (Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and Mali) were spending 10% of the total public expenditure on agriculture. Agricultural research and development are equally underfunded. African governments committed themselves to spend at least 1% of agriculture GDP on research; however, only seven countries of the 41 that reported on this indicator were on track to meeting this target.⁷ Low expenditures in agricultural research and development imply that countries are not generating high productivity and climate resilient technologies that farmers need in the face of climate change. The report also highlighted other challenges: high post-harvest food losses, limited intra-Africa trade in agricultural commodities, and limited domestication of continental policies in national agriculture investment plans (NAIPs). The report provides country-specific profiles that show performance against each of the seven CAADP Malabo commitments and gives recommendations based on the findings to improve performance. However, the majority of countries are yet to develop a culture of using the findings to inform investments choices in the NAIPs and in their annual agricultural sector reviews and budgeting cycles.

Despite the numerous challenges facing Africa's food systems, there are opportunities to spur agricultural transformation to build resilient food systems. First, Africa's growing population and rapid urbanization create demand for high-value crops and livestock products. By 2030, 58% of the African population will live in urban areas.⁸ Urban populations demand more processed foods,⁹ creating opportunities to increase existing agroprocessing industries across the continent. Second, across Africa, economic transformation is taking place and per capita incomes are rising, the middle class is growing, and poverty rates have dropped significantly across the continent. This segment of the population, with more disposable income, consumes high value-added food products and presents an opportunity for agroprocessing and agroindustrialization. Third, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) presents great opportunities



for boosting intra-African trade in agricultural goods and services, thereby reducing dependence on global food markets, saving foreign exchange and boosting farmer incomes. However, the continent will have to work hard to increase intra-African trade. The proportion of African countries' food imports originating from other African countries is currently very low, consistently averaging about 20%¹⁰ over the past several decades, with one country (South Africa) accounting for over a third of this intra-African food trade. Fourth, Africa has consistently pursued its CAADP agenda for the last nineteen years, which has helped rally international support around the common framework. During the UN Food Systems Summit in September 2021, Africa was the only continent that presented a common position at the Summit. Africa has strengthened the culture of speaking with a unified voice in international fora on matters of continental importance. Continued support to the continent by development partners should rally around the continent's strategic priorities under the CAADP agenda.

Key Lessons Learned in CAADP Implementation

In the last two decades, Africa has consistently pursued its CAADP agenda for agricultural transformation. Even though progress is slow toward achieving the Malabo goals and targets by 2025, more than twenty countries are above the 50% mark to reach the goals. Pursing a common framework has created a sense of collective ownership of the continental agenda, even though countries differ in their approaches to implementation at the country level. The CAADP agenda also helped rally development partners around this continental framework, away from the piecemeal and project-focused approaches of the past. The CAADP biennial review mechanism established by the African Union brings together African experts from national research institutions, universities, and think tanks to provide technical support to the continent. These phenomena have increased ownership of the process across various institutions and created grounds for sustainability as the process is entrenched in sustainable institutions.

Policy Options and Recommendations: Priorities and Actions to Achieve Food Security in Africa

In order to address the issues limiting Africa's capacity to achieve food security, five actions are proposed:

1. African countries need to address gaps in policies and planning by domesticating into NAIPs the following:

- a. the priorities in the AU CAADP Business Plan: 2022-2025;
- b. the recommendations for each country in the 3rd CAADP biennial review report;
- c. the pathways for food systems transformation in the Africa Common Position to the UN Food System Summit (UNFSS);
- d. and, the country-specific pathways in the national dialogue reports for the UNFSS.

African governments should lead the domestication process, with the support of the AU Commission (AUC), the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), regional economic communities, non-state actors (e.g., academia, private sector, farmer organizations, and civil society), and development partners. This exercise will lead to efficient utilization of resources by maximizing policy cohesion and consistency and minimizing effort duplication. Even though governments need to take the lead, state actors need the support of different stakeholders. Representatives of development partners at the country level, including the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), can play an important role in supporting the domestication of global and continental priorities in NAIPs. Several countries have donor agriculture sector working groups, and these can engage with governments on the domestication agenda. Technical institutions in Africa, such as the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), the African Network for Agricultural Research Institutions (ANAPRI), AKADEMIYA2063, and others can mobilize and encourage support to countries in the domestication process.



2. Support the production and access to high-quality and affordable agricultural inputs (fertilizer, agrochemicals, seeds, animal breeds, and labor-saving equipment) to increase food production in Africa for the continent to achieve food sovereignty.

Boosting food production requires addressing the systemic constraints at the farm-level: low-yielding crop varieties, declining soil fertility, land tenure security, and water scarcity, among others. The private sector needs to lead in this area with the support of African governments. Governments must create the enabling policy and regulatory environment and provide incentives for the private sector to invest in producing and distributing these inputs to farmers. Most agricultural investments are long-term in nature and require supportive public sector investments including infrastructure (roads, rails, electricity), laws, and regulations (predictable policies, rule of law, secure land tenure). Functional partnerships are needed between the public and the private sector to create and sustain agricultural value chains to increase food production, create jobs, and support intra-African trade in agricultural goods and services. As an action to understand the factors behind the low fertilizer application rates and soil degradation in Africa and to mobilize political support and investments, the AU, with the support of partners, is organizing an Africa Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit in Dakar, Senegal in the last week of June 2023. The outcome of the Summit will be a Heads of State Declaration with commitments to address the challenges of fertilizers and soil health, as well as a ten-year Fertilizer and Soil Health Action Plan to guide subsequent implementation efforts by African governments and the private sector.

3. Invest in agricultural research and development to generate the necessary climate-smart technologies and improve extension and advisory services to farmers.

With the changing climate, African governments need to increase funding to national agricultural research institutions to produce crop varieties capable of withstanding the stresses brought about by climate change. Pest and disease incidences have been rising and are expected to increase. Droughts have become intense, as seen in the ongoing drought in the Horn of Africa (Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia). Agricultural research and development for crop varieties and animal breeds that can tolerate the changing climate is a needed adaptation measure to climate change. The Africa Common Position to the UNFSS suggests that there must be intentional investments toward increased productivity and the production of traditional and indigenous crops, which have for a long time suffered massive under-investments. Traditional and indigenous crops, such as vegetables, grain legumes, root crops and climate-resilient crops such as sorghums, millets, and cassava, are normally low-cost and important nutritionally to local food systems. Further, traditional and indigenous crops are often managed by women. Collaboration and coordination is also needed among the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), continental, regional, and national agricultural research systems to create synergies and maximize resource utilization. This level of coordination requires annual planning meetings among the CGIAR centers, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), the sub-regional research organizations (the Association for Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA), West and Central Africa Council for Agricultural Research (CORAF), and the Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA), and national agricultural research organizations of member states. FARA can lead this effort with the support of the African Union Commission and AUDA-NEPAD.

4. Make investments that will facilitate increased intra-African trade in agricultural goods and services.

The AfCFTA is an opportunity for Africa to use trade as a means of ensuring food security by facilitating the movement of food from areas of surplus to deficit parts of the continent. The investments needed include trans-continental road and rail networks to connect African markets across the continent to reduce the high transaction costs. African governments also need to improve food safety to protect consumers and facilitate trade. To this end, in February 2022, the AU endorsed two strategies—the Food Safety Strategy for Africa and the Plan Health Strategy for Africa. In this area, the AU has been collaborating with and has received support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the



development of the two strategies as well as the Continental Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Policy Framework. African countries need to take lead in domesticating these continental strategies into national action plans for implementation. In order to improve coordination of food safety interventions across the continent, the African Union is in the process of establishing an African Food Safety Agency (AFSA). African governments also need to improve the capacity of the national standards bodies that oversee product standards of both imports and exports. This initiative requires investments in laboratories to conduct necessary product sample tests and instituting regulatory and enforcement mechanisms for product standards. International organizations such as the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Health Organization (WHO), UNCTAD and others should join hands to support African countries to improve food standards in the interest of protecting consumer health and promoting trade in safe foods.

5. Increase investments in country data systems to improve the quality of data. Good policies and plans depend on quality data and analysis.

Every two years, starting in 2017, the AUC and AUDA-NEPAD, in collaboration with regional economic communities (RECs) and partners, produce and present a report to AU Heads of State and Government on the progress that AU Member States are making in the implementation of the CAADP commitments in the Malabo declaration. The biennial review report has now become the reference document for tracking agricultural transformation progress in Africa. The report contains country and regional profiles with detailed performance overviews for countries and regional economic communities against the seven CAADP Malabo commitments. However, the quality and coverage of the data for the forty-nine indicators in the report need improvement. In order to improve the quality of data, African governments need to increase the capacity of their national bureaus of statistics. This means increasing the number and training of staff as well as funding the periodic collection of agricultural statistical data. International organizations with a stake in agricultural data, such as the FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) as well as financial institutions such as the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the World Bank should join hands with African governments to improve their national statistical systems.

Conclusion

With Africa's population set to double by 2050, the time is now to make the right investments to spur sustainable agricultural transformation in order to feed the estimated 2.4 billion people. The partnership between the U.S. and African governments should focus on investments that will do three things.

First is to invest in agricultural research and development to generate climate-smart agricultural technologies, especially for small-scale farmers. This can be achieved by increasing funding to regional and national agricultural research institutions and ensure collaboration with Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR) centers. The United States has made progress in scientific research that could benefit Africa through appropriate technology transfer and reduce the time it would take the continent to develop the same technologies.

Second is to invest in and support public-private partnerships in trans-continental infrastructure (railway and road networks) projects to connect African markets and reduce transaction costs in order to boost intra-Africa trade in agricultural goods and services. The action here is to rally countries within their respective regional economic communities to undertake jointly funded trans-regional infrastructure projects. This is necessary to strengthen on-going regional integration efforts that are necessary for the success of the AfCFTA.

Third is to support efforts aimed at peacebuilding and resolving political conflicts that emerge across the continent, resulting in population displacements and creating humanitarian crises. Peace and stability are panacea to everything else. With strong resolve and commitment between U.S. and African governments—with the AU as the interlocutor—the factors limiting Africa's quest for food sovereignty can be resolved for the benefit of both parties.



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