

AFRICA FOOD SYSTEMS FORUM 2024 COMMUNIQUÉ

Decisions and Commitments from the Africa Food Systems (AFS) Forum 2024

HOSTED BY RWANDA, 2-6 SEPTEMBER 2024

Preamble

1. AFS Forum 2024 underscored and reaffirmed the fundamental importance of food systems, and the critical situation faced by the food and agriculture sectors on this continent. Under the **theme “Innovate, Accelerate, and Scale: Delivering Food Systems Transformation in a Digital and Climate Era”**, it set out to launch Africa's food systems into a transformative era based on sustainability and resilience.
2. Participants from across the continent and beyond charted a bold path forward, recognizing the urgent need to change the way we produce, process, market, and consume food. The continent's brightest minds—thinkers, policymakers, and innovators—shared brilliant new ways to transform our food systems through innovation. The Forum showcased cutting-edge breakthroughs and best practices and called for bold leadership to turn commitments into action. By spotlighting innovations, technologies, and investment opportunities, the event builds a higher level of resilience and food security for the continent.
3. The Summit emphasized the critical roles and voices of youth and women in driving this change. Representing over half of all Africans involved in the agri-food sector, women at the Forum demonstrated their ability to farm, to lead, to create and run successful businesses, to innovate and participate in policy discussions and other important debates. Youth voices led and inspired the Summit, with key announcements boosting investments in their potential.
4. More than 4,900 delegates from 97 countries - including 9 Heads of State and Government, 37 ministers, 7 former Heads of State and Government, and more than 40 heads of international agencies were present. CEOs of global, regional, and national companies, including SMEs, combined to form a private sector delegation of over 420 people. An incredible 1,000 youth attended the Forum, bringing energy, ideas and commitment.
5. The program featured 167 sessions over four full days (3-6 September 2024), including pre-summit activities held on 2 September. Delegates participated in site visits, side events, partner events, plenary sessions, thematic sessions, awards ceremonies, culinary events, digital expos, CEO chats, and the Dealroom. They were joined by close to 150 journalists.
6. The Summit was hosted under His Excellency, Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda. Thirty-one partners and 18 sponsors provided the resources and technical support under the AFSF Partners Group.

Forum Outcomes

7. We recognize the immense potential of Africa's food systems to drive economic growth, improve livelihoods, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa's Agenda 2063. Yet we cannot ignore the grave threats posed by climate change and other external shocks.
8. Through a spirit of partnership, innovation, and collective action, we commit to addressing Africa's challenges head-on by coming together to innovate, accelerate, and scale our efforts to deliver food system transformation in this digital and climate era. We also recognize and accept our accountability to each other to come through on our commitments and investments.
9. The outcomes of the 2024 AFS Forum serve as a clarion call for Africa and the world to embrace the transformative power of resilient food systems. Key elements that emerged as paramount to climate-resilient food system transformation in Africa include:

- i. **Strong political commitment** is a necessary condition for food systems transformation. This must be seen in national coordination and governance, increased collaboration between international and national actors, and strengthened continental bodies. Participants pointed to the need for closer links between agriculture, food, health and environment ministries.
 - ii. **Government-led innovation** drives investment, as demonstrated by the governments of Côte d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Zambia's launch of major new initiatives for investment. Countries are encouraged to prioritize integrated, ambitious programs for investment and growth.
 - iii. **Continental coordination** in the post-Malabo era: member states should adopt a robust and mutually accountable mechanism to support governments and take stock of achievements in reshaping food systems and promoting best practice and investment. 2-3 THINGS THAT POST MALABO MUST EMPHASISE.
 - iv. **Trade** is also a key driver of food systems transformation, particularly the development of African food markets. Delegates emphasized the critical role of the AfCFTA in prioritizing regional trade of food commodities and products. Additionally, further scaling of regional initiatives in the RECs were seen to deliver high returns. Urgent action needs to be taken to reduce non-tariff barriers and export bans within the region to address food insecurity and ensure common prosperity.
 - v. **Link climate action to food systems transformation**, building adaptation and resilience by implementing the Emirates Declaration and mobilizing an increased share of climate funds for investment in the food systems sector.
 - vi. Creating economic opportunities for **Youth and Women** are an effective way of driving inclusion, productivity, and sustainability. We are committed to reducing the gender productivity gap and harnessing the power of youth and entrepreneurship.
 - vii. Increased investment in **Research and development** is needed for crop science, soil health, and climate-smart agriculture practices to increase productivity and guarantee sustainability. Scaling up access to successful R&D outputs to millions of farmers requires focused investment and collaboration between the public and private sectors and both upstream and downstream organizations.
 - viii. **Optimized financial instruments** promoted and enabled by government are crucial to unlock resources from public, private, and developmental partners. Innovative blended finance models open new opportunities and should be scaled with the support of partners.
 - ix. **Investment in digital technology** at scale is a priority, primarily in digital infrastructure, services and capacity through to the last mile to enhance knowledge and practice.
 - x. **MSMEs** are responsible for 85% of Africa's food and offer high returns on investment. Partners should prioritize support for infrastructure, affordable financing, capacity development and enabling policies.
 - xi. **Nutrition**, as an integral component of resilient food systems, requires urgent strategic shifts in food production, food trade policies, institutional buying by governments, and consumer behaviour. High-impact interventions - such as investments in biofortification, crop diversification, the promotion of nutrient-dense foods and improved food processing and preservation technologies - enhance dietary quality, increase micronutrient intake, reduce environmental impacts, and deliver significant socioeconomic benefits, including improved public health and economic resilience.
 - xii. **Extension and advisory services** are indispensable to bringing knowledge and necessary practices to millions of farmers and SMEs. A renewed commitment to these services is needed, using new models including private sector driven, youth-led initiatives and digital technologies.
10. The Africa Food Systems Forum 2024 has been a landmark event, setting the stage for dynamic and impactful progress for Food Systems Transformation. The Forum examined challenges from the point of view of innovation, acceleration, and scalability, with a strong emphasis on country-led initiatives and the fulfilment of commitments. The Forum has inspired us to actively engage, share experiences, and commit to concrete actions that will drive the transformation of food systems across Africa. Let us work together to innovate, accelerate, and scale our efforts towards a brighter, more sustainable future for all.

Forum Highlights

11. Leadership, policy and accountability

Innovation and accountability are the cornerstones of our efforts. The Forum's call to action urges governments, private sector entities, and civil society organizations to unite through public-private partnerships. The critical role of government was emphasized across the Forum, and especially at the Ministerial Round Table.

Leaders emphasized the need for increased coordination and integrated solutions to challenges and opportunities. Governments are key enablers of food systems transformation and they must guide and work with the private sector. The Forum featured the launch of the Africa Agriculture Status Report (AASR), the signature AFS Forum report since 2010, led by AGRA with experts across several African countries. This provided clear recommendations on investments in policy, infrastructure, capacity, and agro-parks.

The discussion on the CAADP in the post-Malabo era pointed to the urgent need for a robust successor agreement, with strong coordination and mutual accountability mechanisms. Delegates agreed on the need to get a rapid start on the new agreement, for governments to come forward about the additional support needed, and to deepen the sharing of analytics between countries to strengthen investment, collaboration and best practices. The private sector and DFIs are encouraged to consider CAADP priorities in their own investment decisions.

12. Nutrition and Health

The Forum has emphasized the urgent need to engage all food system actors in improving nutrition and health outcomes. It is imperative that we integrate comprehensive public policies and programs that address both the supply and demand sides of the food system and ensure access to affordable, healthy food options. The link between climate and nutrition was raised and indicates more investments need to be made to ensure nutrition security in the increasingly adverse climate conditions we will all face. Initiatives such as school feeding that offer diverse and nutritious foods are a high-value investment in addressing poverty and food insecurity.

The Forum issued a resounding call for strong steps towards gender equality, advocating for increased access and support for women-led agriculture and the effective implementation of gender-responsive policies. All stakeholders must work to create opportunities for youth, invest in youth-led innovations, and ensure equitable access to education. Together, let us harness the potential of the younger generation to lead the future of agriculture and food systems in Africa.

GAIN, Zero Hunger and private sector actors pledged to scale up investment in nutrition sensitive value chains, while Rockefeller and other partners launched the Fortified Wholegrain Alliance.

13. Trade and Markets

There is an urgent need to boost intra-Africa trade to meet the projected demand of feeding 2.2 billion people by 2050, while addressing Africa's current annual US\$60-80 billion food import bill. Delegates called for support to key initiatives such as the AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative and the African Food Security Initiative. Inclusivity and collaboration must be at the heart of our efforts, valuing the contributions of marginalized communities, women, and youth. The 2024 Forum afforded young agri-food leaders a unique opportunity to engage directly with industry and political leaders and celebrated the impactful contributions of young entrepreneurs in Africa's agrifood sector.

Key agreements and collaborations included:

- Working sessions between the Governments of Malawi and Tanzania to finalise the framework for signing of a Simplified Trade Regime framework between the two countries.
- Zambia and Malawi, and Zambia and Zimbabwe, are finalizing mutual recognition agreements to further address non-tariff barriers between the country pairs.
- The United Kingdom FCDO also announced that it had recently launched a new funding window worth US\$50 million to support agri-business access financing to expand production & trade in food.

- IFAD launched their private sector programme, which will prioritise partnerships with private actors and innovative financing mechanisms for private sector, particularly in Africa where half of IFAD's global resources are deployed.

14. **Climate and Food Systems**

The Forum demonstrated an unwavering commitment to scaling up the climate resilience of food systems across the continent. Our commitment to this cause will be at the forefront of the conversations at COP29. We are acutely aware that the projected annual cost of climate change adaptation is reaching USD 50 billion, yet current funding flows remain insufficient, with only 20-25% allocated to adaptation efforts. Understanding the financial implications of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in the agriculture sector is crucial for securing international support for low-carbon, climate-resilient pathways.

Endorsed by over 40 African nations at COP28, the UAE Declaration stands as a testament to the continent's commitment to integrating agriculture into national climate policies and increasing investments in sustainable food systems. We applaud this breakthrough and call upon all African nations to build upon this momentum to ensure that their voices are heard, and their needs are addressed at COP29.

The Forum addressed this challenge with action-oriented discussions on the Technical Cooperation Collaborative and key programs on food loss, post-harvest handling, and climate smart practices. This was further developed through the Champions 12.3 coalition, which focused on private sector-led food loss and waste reduction.

As we prepare for COP29, it is imperative that we recognize Africa's pivotal role in the global fight against climate change, as well as the urgent need for substantial support to build resilient food systems capable of feeding the continent and the world in increasingly adverse climate conditions. We commend the leadership of the UNFCCC COP29, through the Azeri government, in championing climate finance. The discussions and insights from this Forum reaffirmed that the international community must act quickly to make good on its pledges to support for the implementation of NDCs in the agriculture sector across Africa - support that must be tailored to the unique needs and challenges faced by each country.

A key priority emerging from the Forum is the mobilization of financial resources to support Africa's transition to climate-smart agriculture and food systems. This includes investments in innovative technologies, capacity-building, and the empowerment of smallholder farmers and marginalized communities. We call upon development partners, financial institutions, and the private sector to collaborate in unlocking the necessary funds to drive this transformation. The Forum has highlighted successful initiatives and scalable best practices, focusing on how banks, non-bank financial institutions, and fintech can mobilize resources to support this transformation.

The rise of philanthropic financing, exceeding \$3.9 billion in 2021, is a step in the right direction to begin addressing food systems investment gaps. The Forum has shown that Philanthropic-Public-Private Partnerships (PPPPs) can be particularly effective in channelling much-needed funds into youth and climate initiatives.

15. **Soil Health: Sustaining the Foundation of Our Food Systems**

The health of our soils is the cornerstone of sustainable food systems across Africa. We must unite to prioritize soil health as a critical component of our agricultural and environmental strategies. Governments, private sector leaders, civil society organizations, researchers, and farmers are urged to collaborate in developing and implementing innovative practices that restore and maintain soil health.

The Forum calls for the development of robust policies and frameworks that prioritize soil health within national and regional agricultural agendas. This involves integrating soil health considerations into climate action plans and ensuring adequate funding and resources are allocated for soil restoration and conservation efforts. Participants emphasized the need comprehensive soil conservation and restoration practices, such as erosion control and conservation agriculture. Enhancing nutrient management and adopting sustainable

agricultural practices were identified as essential for responsible soil utilization, supported by substantial investments in soil research and advanced nutrient assessment technologies.

Building on the success of the African Union's African Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit (AFSH) held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2024, and the African Hub Agro-Dealer Development Conference (HADC), the Forum outlined practical steps for implementing the AFSH 10-Year Action Plan across the continent. Key priorities include: increasing access to affordable and quality fertilizers for smallholder farmers through innovative financing mechanisms and public-private partnerships; strengthening research and development to create context-specific soil management recommendations and fertilizer products tailored to local conditions; empowering farmers with knowledge and skills on best practices through training and extension services; and establishing a regional soil health monitoring system to track progress, identify challenges, and guide evidence-based policymaking and research. The RECs regional roadmaps require support to achieve the goals of the Nairobi declaration, including on organic and inorganic fertilizer use.

16. **Data, Digital and Climate Change**

The intersection of data, digital innovation, and climate action is not just an opportunity; it is a necessity for building resilient communities and sustainable economies. Investments in digital infrastructure and capacity-building, particularly in vulnerable communities, should be prioritized to build food and agriculture as a more resilient business to climate change.

All stakeholders are called to collaborate in leveraging data and digital tools to enhance climate resilience and drive sustainable development and in promoting open data initiatives and other means to ensure equitable access to technology for all.

Governments are urged to commit to creating enabling environments that foster innovation and support the development of digital solutions. This includes enhancing the capacity of institutions to collect, analyse, and disseminate climate-related data, ensuring that it is accessible to all who need it. Coordinated roadmaps aligned with national policies are essential to identify ecosystem gaps and prioritize sustainable investments. Additionally, leveraging the power of big data, advanced analytics, and generative AI can optimize crop production and enhance food security, while civil society and parliamentary forums strengthen accountability and collaboration.

To implement digital solutions, investment in infrastructure for bandwidth and cloud computing across the continent, especially in rural areas, is needed. Forum participants showed how digital information has already helped advance the efforts of smallholders by increasing their access to market information, weather and agronomic advice. More customized solutions, including crowd funding, crowd sourcing, and agronomic crop assessments of crops and macro analysis fuelled by artificial intelligence, can further empower actors all along our food system and facilitate trade across the regions more effectively.

The Forum recognizes the critical role of youth and local communities in this endeavour. Despite some advancements, challenges such as fragmented initiatives, uncertain business models, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of gender and social inclusion hinder the adoption of digital agriculture solutions. The growing penetration of mobile and internet services offers us a unique opportunity to accelerate the digital transformation. By empowering the next generation with the skills and knowledge to utilize data and digital tools, we cultivate a new wave of climate leaders who are equipped to drive transformative change.

17. **Other key collaborations**

The key role of the *seed sector* drew considerable attention, with initiatives including:

- USAID launched their Seed Action Plan, which aligns very closely to the AU's Seed Systems Agenda under the CAADP framework.
- The Seed Sector Performance Index 2024, which has 17 indicators across nearly all African countries was launched, giving a clear basis to measure progress as it will be repeated every 2 years.

- The African Cereal and Legume Breeding Consortium was launched by CGIAR, TAAT and the African Seed Trade Association to accelerate research on drought and disease tolerant varieties.

The *African Extension Initiative* was launched to scale up the coordination efforts and investment in African extension systems, including government, public and private extension delivery services.

18. **AFSF Agribusiness Dealroom**

During the week, major commitments in nutrition, innovation, renewable energy, climate change, regional trade, and investment were made. The Agribusiness Dealroom brought together 10 governments and over 30 SMEs, including youth and women entrepreneurs, to engage with over 60 investors. The Forum gave 33 SMEs the chance to pitch their ideas directly, and over 60 in-person SME-investor meetings were held. Together, the SMEs participating in the Dealroom were seeking USD 70 million in financing. The AFSF Dealroom was also an opportunity to work closely with governments to build investor confidence and secure increased private-sector investment, especially in processing, logistics, and technology development. The Dealroom confirmed AFSF's position as a prime venue for connecting agribusinesses with investment opportunities and critically needed capital.

The AFS Forum recognised the breadth of policy and financial commitments required to drive investments from both governments and the private sector. Approximately USD 2 billion in investments in government initiatives have been developed, and we hope that more announcements of this kind will follow.

19. **AFSF Awards Ceremonies**

The AFS Forum celebrates the talent and leadership on the transformation of food systems that exists across Africa. Recognizing the urgency of raising ambition to meet the demands of current and future generations in ending hunger, the AFSF Awards program shines the spotlight on the inspiring work of individuals, particularly women and youth, as well as institutions and coalitions on the continent.

A powerful platform to showcase the innovations, initiatives, and trailblazers pioneering solutions to the complex challenges facing food systems, the AFSF 2024 Awards Program is a testament to the immense talent and potential that exists across Africa, and a reminder of what can be achieved when we invest in and empower our human capital.

The prizes awarded this year were:

1. The Africa Food Prize
2. The GO GETTAZ agripreneur prizes
3. The Pitch AgriHack awards
4. The Value4Her WAYA awards