

2026

Impact, Learning and Foresight Report

**Africa's agrifood system
transformation and the
path ahead**



AGRA
Sustainably Growing
Africa's Food Systems



**When
Farmers Prosper,
Africa Prospers.**



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Contents

Preface	6
About AGRA	8
At a glance	9
Executive summary	10
Introduction and context	32
Africa’s future depends on its agrifood systems	33
Agriculture has long powered African economies and societies	34
The legacy of under-investment	34
A uniquely African Green Revolution	36
Twenty years on: Taking stock and opening a new era	40
CHAPTER 1: Africa’s unfinished agrifood system transformation	42
Stages of agrifood system transformation	45
A sector on the move: Progress on the drivers of transformation	47
Africa’s agrifood transformation gap – and its consequences	53
Different country and value-chain realities	60
Diagnosis: Why hasn’t Africa’s transformation engine ignited?	64
CHAPTER 2: AGRA: Twenty years of impact and learning	76
AGRA’s evolution	80
AGRA 1.0 (2006 – 2016): Building the foundations	82
AGRA 2.0: (2017 – 2022) Connecting the pieces	96
AGRA 3.0 (2023 – 2028): Deepening impact	111
AGRA’s 20-year impact and what it reveals	118
CHAPTER 3: Africa’s path forward: Navigating the next twenty years	122
The future Africa can build	124
Trends: Managing pressures, seizing opportunity	125
An integrated agenda: Five requirements, and what must change	128
Coordination for sustained delivery	136
CHAPTER 4: AGRA’s catalytic role in Africa’s agrifood transformation	144
AGRA was founded with a catalytic intent	146
AGRA’s role: Catalysing sustained delivery around shared ambitions	150
What the learning could imply for AGRA’s ways of working	158
A renewed Alliance	160
Appendix: AGRA’s donors	161
Acknowledgements	162
Endnotes	163
References	169

Preface

Africa’s agrifood system sits at the heart of the continent’s economy, social fabric and natural resource base. It sustains livelihoods, fuels food businesses and industry, and creates opportunities for Africa’s youthful workforce. When smallholder farmers prosper, agriculture becomes an investable engine of growth, jobs, resilience and shared prosperity.

Africa’s path to prosperity depends on the prosperity of its smallholder farmers. AGRA was founded as an alliance, grounded in the belief that Africa’s farmers, governments, researchers, businesses and partners could drive a uniquely African green revolution and food systems transformation. As AGRA turns 20 in 2026, this report returns to that founding purpose: to take honest stock, learn deliberately, and look ahead with discipline.

Commissioned under the leadership of AGRA’s Board, this report marks a moment of honest reflection after two decades of collective effort. The transformation Africa seeks has not yet been achieved. This report is therefore not merely about AGRA; it is intended for the continent’s wider agrifood ecosystem as a whole to take stock of what has been built, where progress has fallen short, what lessons must be carried forward, and how the next decade of action can be more focused, integrated and accountable.

The past two decades have shown what it takes to sustain progress across production, value creation and institutional capability. These gains were achieved through a

wider ecosystem of governments, farmers, businesses, researchers, continental institutions, and implementing and resource partners. AGRA’s contribution has been to catalyse and broker partnerships within this collective effort.

The bottom line is clear: Africa has not yet achieved the agrifood transformation it needs. But measured against where African agriculture stood 20 years ago, and in many respects 40 years ago, there has been important progress and foundation-building. Agricultural output has grown, seed systems and agribusinesses have expanded, and more farmers are connected to inputs, knowledge and markets. The task now is to remain focused on the goal, learn from what worked, confront what did not, and take the effort to the next level.

- **The productivity trap** keeps yields and output too low, variable, and vulnerable to climate stress, land pressure and market shocks.
- **The value trap** prevents production from consistently converting into reliable income, jobs, viable enterprises and healthier food systems.
- **The capability trap** weakens execution, accountability, resilience and the ability to sustain change at scale when institutions, policies, investments, delivery systems, technical skills and people capability do not work in tandem.

Going forward, Africa’s agrifood transformation must solve constraints as an integrated agenda. This calls for a renewed alliance anchored in farmer prosperity, science, local knowledge and agriculture as an investable asset, and accountability for results. In this renewed alliance, AGRA must focus where it can be most catalytic, namely aligning actors around country priorities and enabling partners to deliver measurable results for farmers.

We are deeply grateful to the farmers, governments, partners, staff and institutions who have worked alongside AGRA over the past two decades. This report is a shared record of our collective contributions and learning. We also honour Kofi Annan, our founding chair, whose call for a uniquely African Green Revolution brought AGRA into being and continues to challenge us to pursue transformation that is African-led, evidence-based and anchored in dignity.

Twenty years on, we recommit AGRA to its founding purpose: helping to build the renewed alliance needed for an African-led transformation anchored in farmer prosperity. In the decade ahead, that alliance must translate shared ambition into more reliable incomes for farmers, stronger institutions, better coordinated delivery, and productive landscapes that can sustain generations to come. The future of Africa’s agrifood systems is in our hands.



H.E. Hailemariam Dessalegn
Chair, AGRA



Alice Ruhweza
President, AGRA

About AGRA

Established in 2006, AGRA was founded to help rebuild Africa’s agricultural systems and to advance a transformation led by African institutions, built on African science, and designed for African conditions. It grew out of Kofi Annan’s 2004 call for a uniquely African Green Revolution and an independent scientific assessment, commissioned on his behalf, of how to raise agricultural productivity and food security across the continent. The Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided AGRA’s early backing, and Kofi Annan served as its founding Chair.

AGRA was conceived as an alliance rather than a single delivery agency. Its purpose has been to bring together governments, businesses, researchers, farmers, funders and other partners behind a shared ambition, and to use its resources to unlock wider action. AGRA is headquartered in Nairobi, and it works alongside national governments and partners in its focus countries across sub-Saharan Africa.

AGRA’s role combines a technical understanding of seeds, soils, extension, markets, finance and policy with relationships across the institutions that set policy, direct investment and deliver programmes. Its distinctive contribution is the ability to connect these parts: to identify how constraints across

farms, markets, finance and government reinforce one another, and to help the relevant actors align behind shared priorities. Over 20 years, this work has taken shape across three periods: AGRA 1.0 (2006 – 2016), building farm-level and market foundations; AGRA 2.0 (2017 – 2022), integrating them through country-led programmes; and AGRA 3.0 (2023 – 2028), deepening impact and placing farmers’ incomes, jobs, nutrition and resilience at the centre. AGRA also stewards the Africa Food Systems Forum, the continent’s largest annual platform for agricultural policy, investment and partnership.

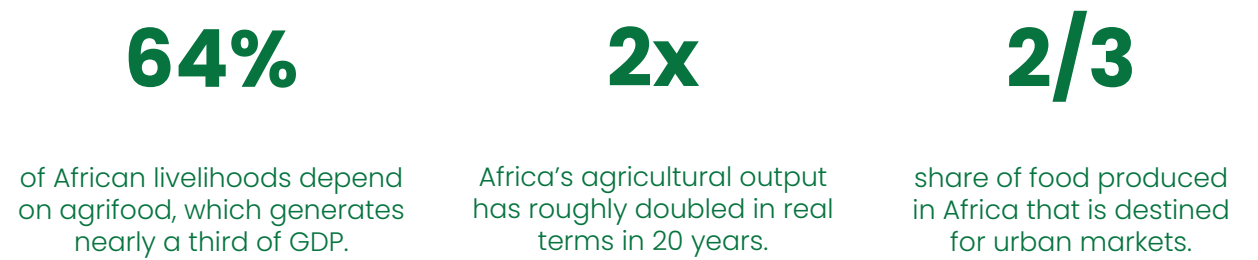
AGRA is governed by a Board of Directors, currently chaired by H.E. Hailemariam Dessalegn, and a management team with Alice Ruhweza as President.

The *Impact, Learning and Foresight Report* reflects on the organisation’s first two decades. The report draws evidence from independent evaluations; outcome assessments conducted by external firms; published research; and consultations with governments, funders, researchers and private-sector partners. Throughout, AGRA is treated as one contributor among many to Africa’s agricultural progress over this period.

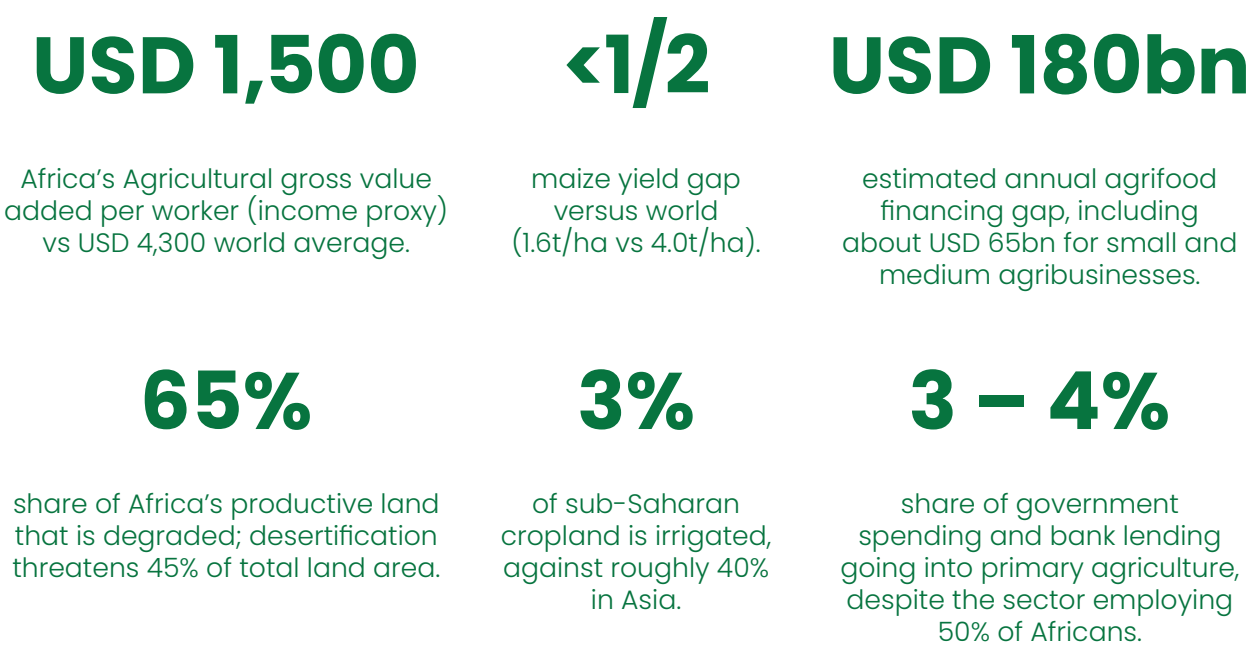
For more information about AGRA and to access its reports, visit agra.org.

At a glance

A critical sector, on the move



Why transformation remains unfinished



The stakes and opportunities ahead



Executive summary

Impact, learning and foresight after 20 years

Africa’s future is closely tied to its agrifood systems. The sector supports almost two-thirds of the continent’s livelihoods, generates roughly a third of its GDP and absorbs close to half of its household spending. How the sector grows will also shape the soils, water, forests and biodiversity on which future production depends.

Transforming the agrifood economy will drive wider economic and social transformation. It will supply raw materials to manufacturing, create demand for transport, energy, finance and digital services, and generate jobs in rural areas and cities. Higher incomes and more affordable food will give households more

to spend on health and education, while a broader tax base will give governments more revenue for infrastructure and public services.

AGRA’s 20th anniversary provides a timely moment to take stock: to reflect on what AGRA has contributed, where it has fallen short, what it has learned and how its role may need to evolve. This report is not a technical evaluation or a new strategy. It takes a broad view of AGRA’s first two decades within the wider transformation of Africa’s agrifood systems, highlighting the progress made, the gaps remaining and the choices that now matter for the continent and for AGRA.

Four questions guide the report

- 1

How have Africa’s agrifood systems changed over the past 20 years, and why has transformation remained challenging?
- 2

What did AGRA help to build, what endured or fell short, and what was learned?
- 3

What will it take to change the trajectory of Africa’s agrifood systems over the next 20 years?
- 4

What is AGRA’s distinctive value proposition, and how can it catalyse change at country and continental levels?

“**Africa has the land and the people. We have the potential to feed not just our own citizens but to help create a secure global food system. This is the enormous prize now within our grasp.**

— Kofi Annan, Chair of the Board, AGRA (2011)



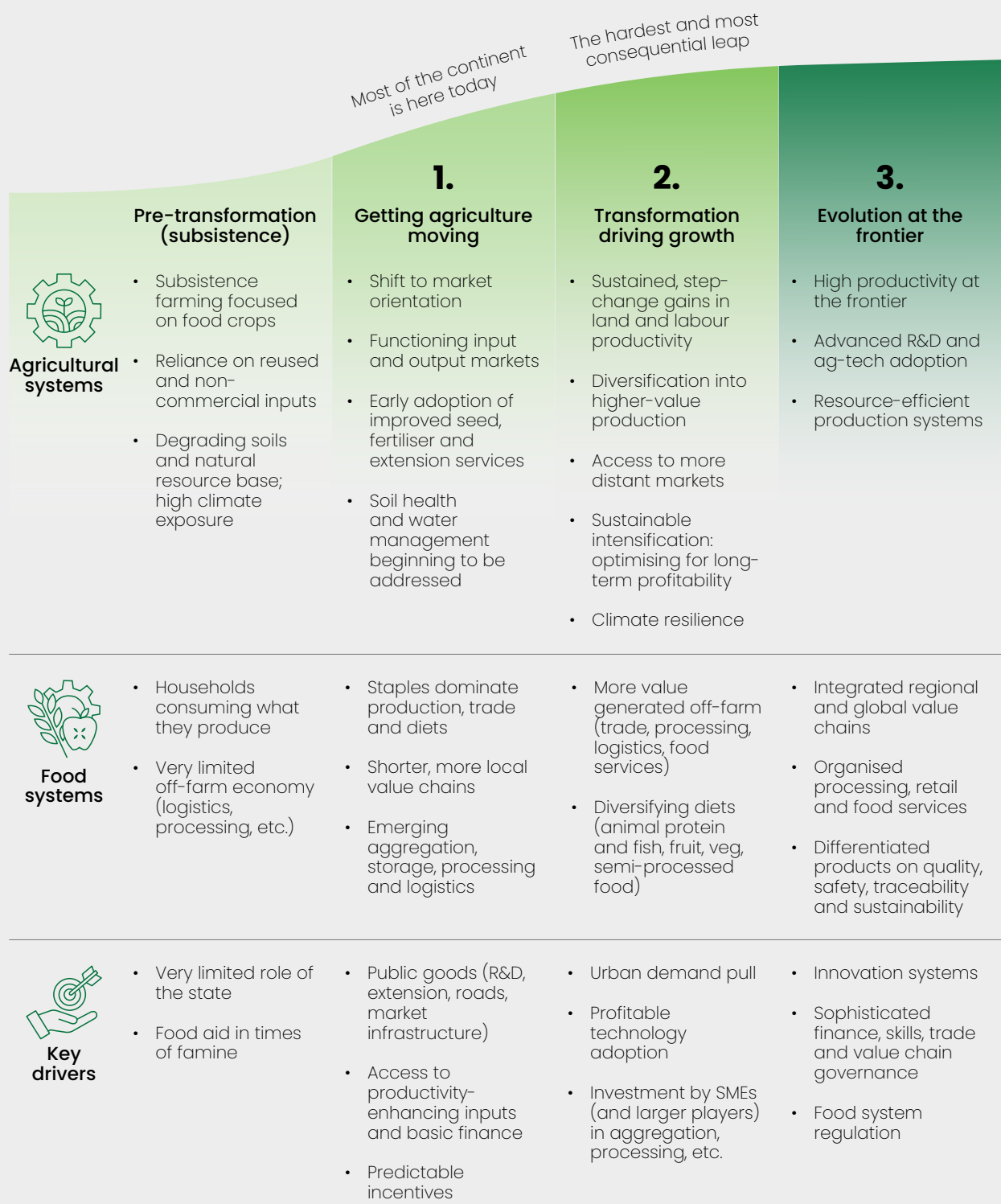
1. Africa’s unfinished agrifood system transformation

Transformation is about more than just producing more food. It is the shift from low-productivity farming towards a productive, market-oriented agrifood economy in which farmers earn more, businesses add value beyond the farm, food becomes more affordable and nutritious and the sector begins to pull the wider economy along with it. Production, markets and institutions advance together, and the gains are not lost to poor weather or market shocks.

The past two decades have brought meaningful progress in Africa’s agrifood

system: agriculture is more commercial in many countries, food markets are larger and the businesses connecting producers to consumers are more active. Yet much of the continent remains in the preliminary “getting agriculture moving” stage of development (Exhibit 1). Agriculture is advancing, but productive farms, strong markets and wider economic growth do not yet reinforce one another at scale. The next task is to turn the progress to date into sustained gains in productivity, incomes, value addition and employment.

Stages of agrifood system transformation



Source: Adapted from Timmer (1988; 2009); Diao et al (2024); Reardon & Minten (2021).

A sector on the move

Structural adjustment and liberalisation in the 1980s and the 1990s reduced state control but also weakened extension, research and marketing institutions in many African countries. From the early 2000s, African leaders renewed their focus on agriculture through the 2003 CAADP Maputo commitments.

The past 20 years have brought real gains. Africa’s agricultural GDP growth accelerated from about 2.3% a year in prior decades to over 4% after 2000, while farm output roughly doubled in real terms after 2005.¹ Local seed industries emerged, thousands of agro-dealers brought inputs closer to farmers, and a much larger economy of traders, aggregators and processors developed between farms and consumers (Exhibit 2).² About 80% of the food Africans eat is now purchased rather than grown at home.³

The comparisons in Exhibit 2 combine continental trends with evidence from countries and areas where AGRA and many other actors work. They show how the sector has changed since 2005, but do not suggest that progress was uniform or attributable to AGRA alone.

Breakthroughs show what is possible

Some countries and value chains have moved much further than others. Ethiopia expanded wheat production through sustained state leadership and investment. Rwanda maintained national growth in staple crops. Kenya built a globally competitive smallholder horticulture sector. Côte d’Ivoire came to supply around 40% of the world’s cashew nuts, while Zambia built up a major soybean sector almost from scratch. Poultry, edible oils, dairy, aquaculture and fresh produce have also grown rapidly in several domestic markets.

These cases followed different routes, but they shared several features: production responded to a clear market opportunity; complementary investments arrived along the value chain; public and private actors solved problems together; and the effort continued long enough for businesses, infrastructure and skills to develop. Such cases show that transformation is possible in African conditions, but only when investments and actors come together over time.

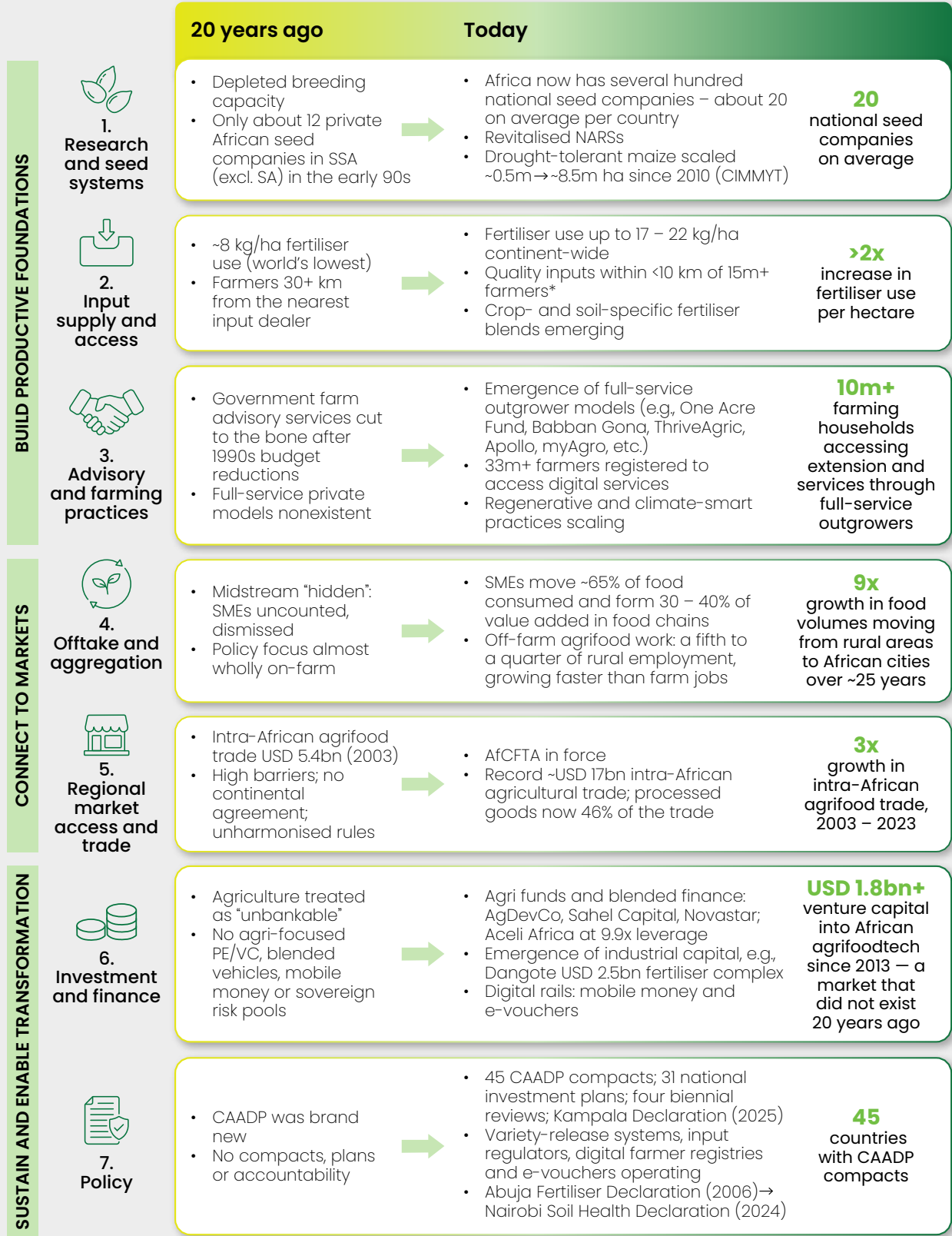
“Without the efforts to transform agrifood systems, there would have been far more poor and hungry people in Africa. The progress has not been as fast as we would like, but overall the African agrifood system is being transformed. There is no doubt of it.

— Shenggen Fan, former Director General, IFPRI



Exhibit 2

A sector on the move: Progress over the last 20 years



Source: AGRA (2020, 2021); World Bank (WDR 2008); Abuja Declaration on Fertilizer (2006); FAOSTAT; CIMMYT; One Acre Fund (2025); Apollo Agriculture (2025); Mastercard Foundation; CTA & Dalberg (2019); Reardon (2015); Reardon et al. (2021); Reardon & Minten (2021); AGRA Africa Agriculture Status Report (2019); AKADEMIYA2063 & IFPRI, Africa Agriculture Trade Monitor (2023–25); AfCFTA Secretariat; Aceli Africa (2024); AgFunder (2023); company disclosures; AU/CAADP Biennial Review; ReSAKSS; Kampala CAADP Declaration (2025); Nairobi Declaration on Fertilizer and Soil Health (2024); AU Seed Sector Status Report (2021).

*10m+ (row 3) reflects company-reported annual reach across One Acre Fund (5.9m), Apollo (0.4m+), ThriveAgric, Babban Gona, myAgro and peers. Reference years vary by indicator.

The gains have not added up to widespread transformation across most of the continent

In 2023, agricultural value added per worker in sub-Saharan Africa was about USD 1,500 against a world average of about USD 4,300 – a gap that has widened since 2000.⁴ Cereal production roughly tripled over the three decades to the late 2010s, but yields rose by only about a third. A large share of additional output came from cultivating more land.⁵ That expansion has increased pressure on forests, rangelands and biodiversity. Only about 12 – 15% of Africa’s agricultural GDP comes from agro-processing, compared with more than 60% in developed regions.⁶

The consequences are visible in people’s lives. Hunger has risen in Africa over the past decade, even as it has fallen globally. Roughly two-thirds of Africans cannot afford a healthy diet.⁷ Only about 3% of cropland in sub-Saharan Africa is equipped for irrigation, so a failed rainy season can quickly become a food and financial crisis.⁸ Africa’s food-import bill reached about USD 65 billion in 2025, sending abroad part of the income, investment and employment that competitive domestic supply could retain.⁹

Why progress has not spread or endured

Three connected constraints have stalled widespread transformation. In many places, the foundations for productive and resilient farming, including water, quality inputs, advice, infrastructure and ways to manage risk, remain incomplete. In countries or value chains where more of these foundations exist, fragmented markets and weak coordination prevent them from working together. Across both, finance, consistent policy and capable institutions are needed to fund public goods and sustain delivery over many years (Exhibit 3).

This is why improving any single input is not enough. Better seed cannot raise incomes without healthy soils, water, advice, finance and reliable buyers. Processors will not invest without dependable supply. Banks will not lend where risks are poorly understood, and governments cannot sustain progress where responsibilities are fragmented or policies change abruptly.



Where transformation stalls along the build-connect-sustain pathway



2. AGRA: 20 years of impact and learning

AGRA was created in 2006 to help African partners rebuild weak agricultural foundations and give practical form to Kofi Annan’s call for a uniquely African Green Revolution. AGRA’s role was catalytic from the outset: to work with and through governments, researchers, businesses, farmers, funders and continental institutions to enable change that extended beyond its own grants.

AGRA 1.0 (2006 – 2016): Building foundations

AGRA’s first decade focused on building components that were weak or missing: improved crop varieties, African plant breeders, local seed companies, agro-dealers, soil-health knowledge and advisory services, alongside early work on markets, finance and policy. AGRA supported breeding across more than ten staple crops, trained scientists and agro-dealers, helped establish local seed businesses and tested risk-sharing models for agricultural lending. The premise was mainly supply-side. If better inputs and advice reached farmers, productivity would rise, incomes and food security would follow, and markets would absorb the surplus. It was also during this period that the Africa Food Systems Forum – formerly the Africa Green Revolution Forum – was transferred to AGRA. The Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund was also formed by AGRA during this era.

AGRA 2.0 (2017 – 2022): Integrating country delivery and expanding continental engagement

AGRA 2.0 combined two approaches: strengthening national systems and policies, and concentrating integrated delivery in selected regions and value chains. Country offices anchored programmes in government priorities, while area-based consortia brought seed, soil health, extension, aggregation, markets and finance together for the same farmers and priority crops.

AGRA also expanded its work with regional and continental institutions on trade, policy and shared food-security challenges. Results were strongest where farmers received production support alongside access to reliable buyers and finance. However, many farmers still lacked both, and higher yields did not consistently lead to higher incomes or resilience.

AGRA 3.0 (2023 – 2028): Transforming food systems

AGRA 3.0 retains the main technical areas of AGRA’s earlier work but places greater weight on outcomes for farmers, SMEs, and the wider food system: profitable and climate-resilient production; stronger enterprises and investment; capable government institutions; better nutrition; and greater economic opportunity for women and young people. Early results are strongest in the areas of production and government support. Among targeted farmers, maize yields increased by 26%, with larger gains in rice and soybean, but varied across geographies. Six countries developed food-systems strategies and USD 691m in additional resources was mobilised for national governments to use in food systems transformation. Progress is also emerging in markets, women’s productivity and youth employment, but meeting the strategy’s targets will require faster progress in access to finance, enterprise growth and new employment.

What changed, where AGRA contributed and what the experience reveals

The changes across Africa’s agrifood sector were driven by governments, farmers, businesses, researchers and development partners. Exhibit 4 shows where AGRA contributed to that wider progress; it does not present the results as AGRA’s achievement alone.



AGRA’s contribution to building Africa’s food system foundations

	What AGRA contributed	What remains to be addressed
 Seed systems	118 seed companies and over 650 improved seed varieties released.	Quality seed still reaches too few farmers; many breeding and regulatory bodies remain underfunded.
 Soil and input access	25,000 supported agro-dealers, 33,000 community extensionists and more than 5 million farmers trained on soil health and climate – smart practices.	Fertiliser and lime stay costly and hard to reach, and degradation continues across large areas.
 Access to markets	Over 20 years integrating farmers into targeted value chain development for rice, pulses, sorghum, millet, potatoes, maize, cassava and wheat.	Structured trade reaches few farmers; finance, infrastructure, storage, agroprocessing and farmer-offtaker contracting remain constraints.
 Finance and enterprise	Risk sharing, blended and value chain financing models developed, lender partnerships and challenge funds.	The financing gap stays vast: affordable credit, insurance and growth capital remain out of reach.
 Scientific capability	Postgraduate training for about 800 scientists, two centres of excellence and a new generation of researchers.	Africa has too few researchers, and institutions lack the funding and pathways to retain talent.
 Policy and government capability	Strengthened government planning and coordination, reforms across seed, fertiliser and trade, and stronger CAADP accountability.	Weak delivery and coordination mechanisms, implementation challenges, and limited public-private collaboration.
 Partnerships	USD 2.5bn mobilised across private and public sector.	Coordination gaps among strategic partners remain.
 Women, youth and nutrition	Platforms for women-led agribusinesses and young entrepreneurs. 176,000 new, improved or additional work opportunities for youth.	Considerable structural challenges for youth and women remain.

Five lessons from 20 years of work

1

Foundations matter – and must remain strong

Local seed companies, scientists, agro-dealers, soil knowledge, market institutions and policy capability created a base that did not exist at the same depth in 2006. Where these foundations became locally rooted, the gains were more likely to endure.

2

The parts have to work together

Better seed and sounder advice produced stronger results when farmers also had finance, healthy soils, aggregation and reliable buyers. Integration is not a programme label; it is whether complementary support reaches the same place, value chain and people at the right time.

3

Production is only a means to prosperity

Higher yields matter when they raise and stabilise incomes, support viable enterprises, create good work and improve access to nutritious food. AGRA’s strongest capabilities remain closer to production than to these wider outcomes.

4

Institutions determine whether progress lasts

Results weakened when they depended on temporary grants, AGRA’s coordination or individual champions. Government capability, local organisations, commercial incentives and clear accountability are what carry change beyond a programme.

5

Inclusion must be designed into economic outcomes

Reaching women and young people did not ensure that they gained equal income, finance, influence or good work. Those outcomes require changes in programme design, markets, institutions and measurement, not participation targets alone.

What these lessons mean for AGRA

Twenty years of experience points to where AGRA can have its greatest future impact. AGRA should continue its work in productivity, resilience, and access to markets and finance, where it adds value. And it should also use its expertise, relationships and resources more

deliberately to strengthen institutions, improve policy delivery and align the actors and investments needed for transformation. This would allow AGRA to influence change on a scale far beyond its own programmes.

3. Africa’s path forward: Navigating the next 20 years

**Kampala Declaration:
selected targets for 2035**

45%

growth in agrifood output

3x

increase in intra-African
agrifood trade

35%

of agrifood GDP from locally
processed food

30%

of agricultural land under
sustainable land management

0

hunger

50%

reduction in extreme poverty

Africa enters the next 20 years with stronger agrifood foundations and a much larger market. Its population is expected to reach about 2.5 billion by 2050 and become majority urban around the mid-2030s, while demand rises for fresh, nutritious and higher-value foods. Advances in breeding, digital advice, renewable energy, cold chains and finance can ease constraints that have long limited production and value addition. The African Continental Free Trade Area can connect surplus and deficit markets and give businesses the scale to invest.

The Kampala Declaration expresses that opportunity in practical terms. If African countries meet their targets, the continent will produce more from its land, earn more from what it produces and create more work beyond the farm.

The current path will not deliver the progress needed

On current trends, demand is likely to grow faster than competitive domestic supply. Food imports could roughly double to about USD 130 billion by 2035, while much additional output would still come from bringing more land under cultivation. That would add pressure to soils, water, forests, biodiversity and pastoral systems without closing the productivity gap. A fast-growing workforce would enter an economy that has not created enough productive work in its largest source of sustaining livelihoods.

Conditions are also becoming more challenging. Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of droughts, floods and heatwaves; conflict and insecurity are disrupting production, trade and livelihoods; development finance is tighter; debt limits public investment; and geopolitical disruption can raise the cost of food, fertiliser and energy with little warning. At the same time, urban demand, regional integration and technology are expanding what is possible. These forces make investment and sustained delivery more valuable, and delay more costly.

An integrated agenda: Five requirements must advance together

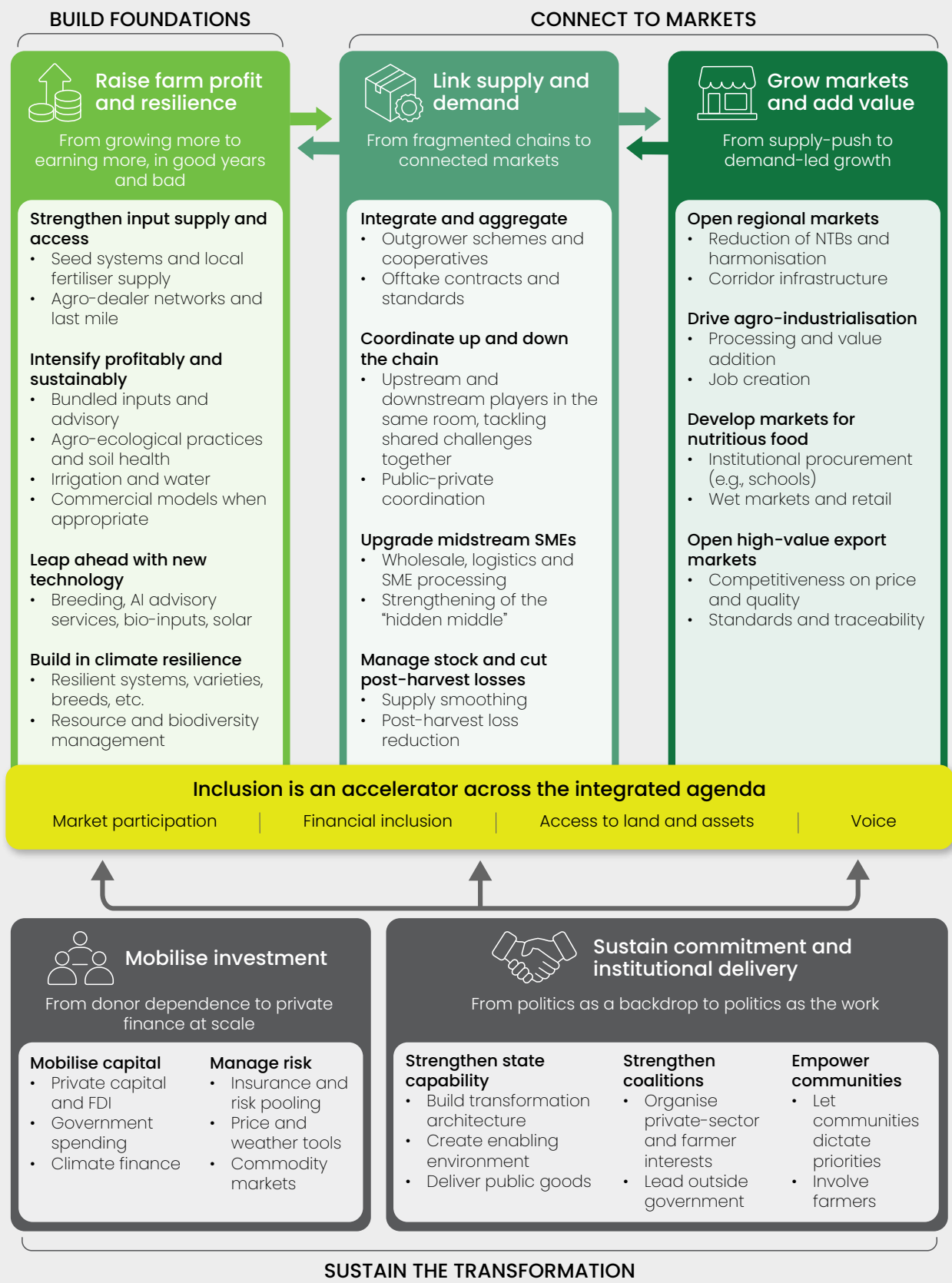
This report does not propose a wholly new agenda. It brings the evidence together around five requirements: profitable and resilient production; stronger links between supply and demand; markets that add value and create jobs; investment that can manage agricultural risk; and political commitment backed by institutions able to deliver (Exhibit 5).

The first three requirements (raise profitability and resilience; link supply and demand;

and grow markets and add value) form the economic engine. The final two – mobilise investment and sustain commitment and institutional delivery – make it investable and durable. Better seed will not raise incomes without water, finance and buyers; processors will not grow without dependable supply; capital will not enter where returns are weak or policies are unpredictable; and political commitment produces little without institutions able to implement it.



Five requirements for transformation in one integrated agenda



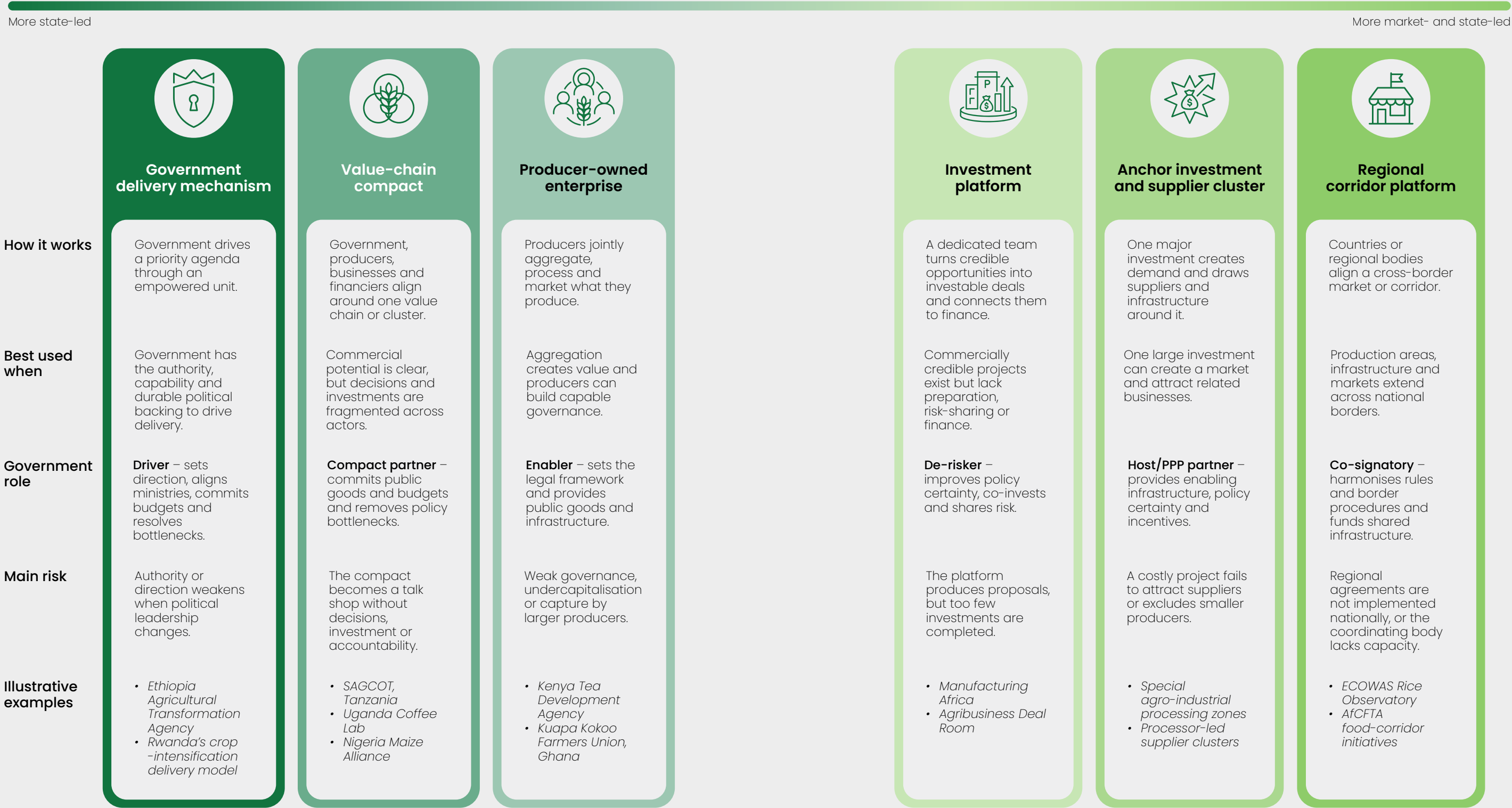
Coordination for sustained delivery

A central challenge is keeping complementary actors and investments aligned long enough to produce lasting change (Exhibit 6). Coordination means agreeing on a clear outcome, assigning responsibilities, establishing an enabling policy environment, sequencing public and private investment, resolving bottlenecks and maintaining accountability through implementation. It may be organised around a production area, national value chain, trade corridor or continental priority.

The state remains indispensable because it sets policy and standards, funds public goods, regulates markets and provides infrastructure at scale. Where political backing and capability are strong, government can lead coordination directly. In other contexts, industry bodies, producer organisations, specialised agencies, regional institutions or investment platforms may coordinate delivery, while government provides the necessary rules and public goods. The mechanism should fit the task and strengthen the institutions that must carry the work forward.

Six example mechanisms for orchestrating delivery

Illustrative, not exhaustive. These are not competing models for the whole continent, a country may use several at once for different purposes.



4. AGRA's catalytic role in Africa's agrifood transformation

This section shares emerging perspectives coming out of learning and foresight. AGRA's subsequent strategy reviews and partner engagements will sharpen our strategic direction.

AGRA was conceived as an alliance. Its purpose from the outset was to bring governments, businesses, researchers, farmers, funders and other partners together, using its resources to unlock wider action. Even when AGRA worked directly with seed companies, aggregators, buyers and financiers, it did so in only a few countries, regions and value chains. Its wider impact depended on what its partners carried forward.

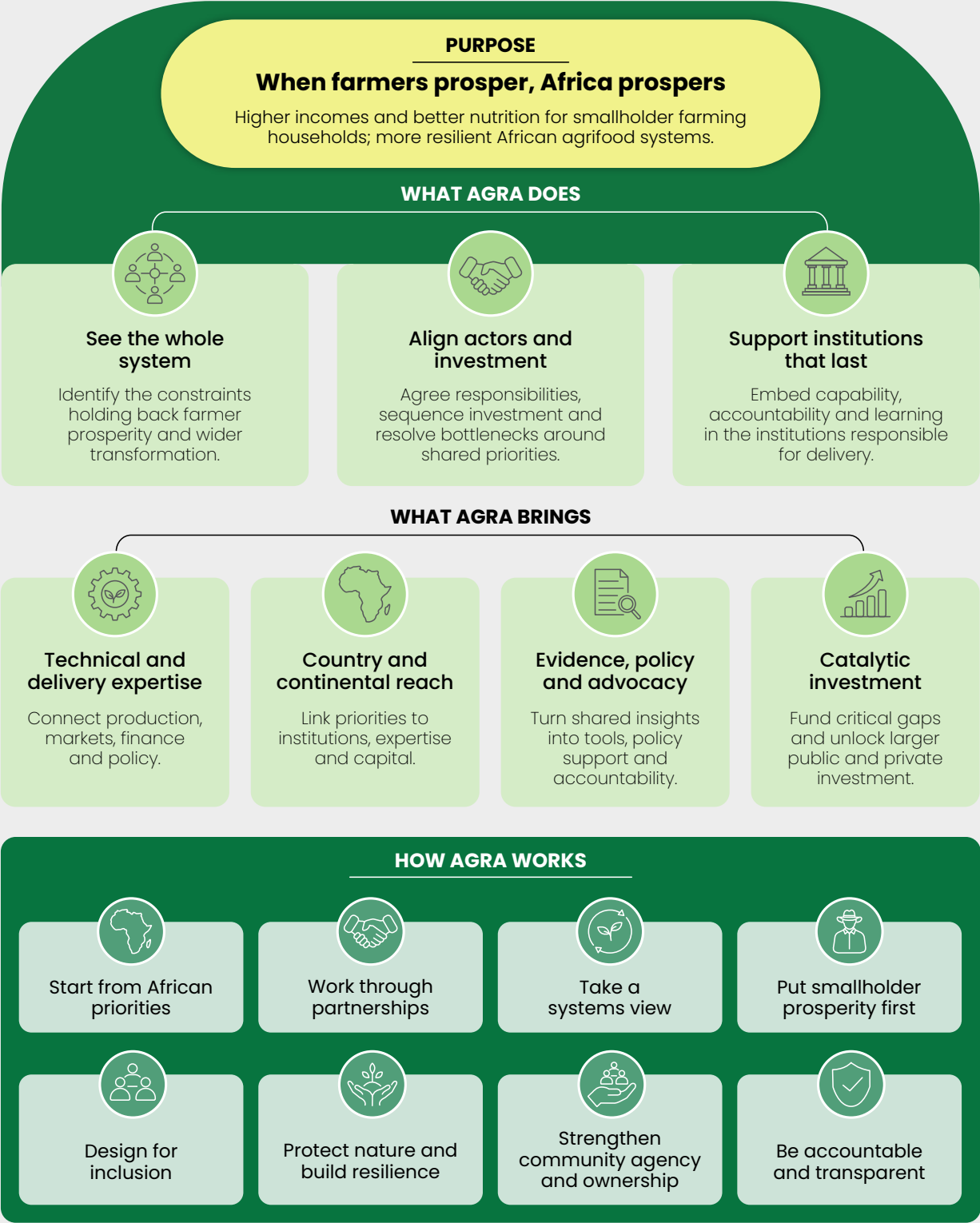
AGRA's catalytic design and ambition are even more relevant today. Africa's needs are vast, while traditional sources of funding for the sector are in retreat. Climate change, urbanisation, technological change and geopolitical pressure are making transformation more urgent and complex. At the same time, the agrifood ecosystem has matured significantly, giving AGRA greater opportunity to work with and through capable partners.

AGRA's value proposition

AGRA's distinctive value proposition is to help African institutions turn shared transformation priorities into sustained delivery. It combines four mutually reinforcing strengths: catalytic investment; technical and delivery expertise; country and continental reach; and evidence, policy and advocacy. AGRA applies these strengths to diagnose whole systems, align and mobilise actors and investment behind shared priorities, and institutionalise the ownership and capability needed for progress to last, with smallholder prosperity as the ultimate test.

AGRA will continue targeted programmes and grants where technical or delivery gaps remain, while using its coordination and institutional work to increase their reach and impact. AGRA's value proposition will take different shapes at country and continental levels, always depending on the specific problems and partner capabilities in a given geography or opportunity area.

Exhibit 7
AGRA's value proposition



Range of established and potential roles for AGRA at country and continental levels

		Objectives	Potential roles
IN COUNTRIES – Strengthening institutions and aligning ecosystems	1  Unlock the recipe for on-farm transformation	Get seed, soil, finance and extension working as one system, with a focus on increasing farmer income and sustainability.	Grants and technical support to build seed systems, soil health, extension and farmer finance.
	2  Grow markets and opportunity beyond the farm	Build the demand side – regional and export markets, aggregation, processing – to give farmers a reason to invest.	Investment in aggregation, processing and market linkages connecting farmers to buyers.
	3  Orchestrate end-to-end value chain transformation	Pick priority value chains in specific countries and align all actors (public + private) around a shared transformation agenda.	Coordination mechanisms aligning public and private actors behind priority value chains.
	4  Bolster institutional capacity to deliver	Put governments in the lead – embedding advisory and helping to build durable institutions that can steward long-term agendas.	Advisory support embedded in ministries; planning and delivery systems strengthened.
ACROSS AFRICA – Continental leadership	5  Drive catalytic continental initiatives	Concentrate on a few big initiatives – private capital, trade corridors, agro-industry, resilient systems – across more countries.	Partnership in continental initiatives on trade, capital mobilisation and resilience.
	6  Champion the agrifood transformation agenda	Champion CAADP and serve as clearinghouse for ideas and solutions across a fragmented landscape.	Support to continental institutions to set, track and champion the transformation agenda.

At the country level, AGRA can organise partnerships around a small number of concrete outcomes, with particular focus on strengthening anchor institutions, aligning stakeholder ecosystems, and mobilising public and private finance. The form and depth of engagement should vary with local needs, capabilities and opportunities, and be deepest where governments or other anchor institutions are committed to leading and sustaining the work. As ownership and capability deepen, AGRA should be able to step back.

At the continental and regional levels, AGRA will work with partners to accelerate a number of priorities – potentially in areas such as food corridors, investment mobilisation, agro-industrialisation and job creation, sustainability and resilience, and crisis response. AGRA will also champion agrifood system transformation by supporting continental

institutions (such as the African Union, AUDA-NEPAD and the AfCFTA Secretariat) to translate commitments into implementation, and by helping to share and adapt transformative ideas across countries.

Country and continental agendas will complement one another. Countries can serve as “lighthouses” – creating proof cases and learnings that can inform and motivate transformation agendas across the continent. Action at the continental level will help to address common constraints that countries cannot solve alone.

In both its country and continental roles, AGRA will continue to evolve. This will likely entail working through alliances and institutions; going deeper on fewer, bigger priorities for longer; leading with expertise, with grants as a strategic instrument; and embracing shared accountability for lasting, system-level results.



A renewed Alliance

AGRA was founded on a simple belief: Africa's agrifood transformation is possible, and no single actor can deliver it alone. Twenty years of experience have strengthened that conviction. The foundations are stronger and more African institutions and businesses are equipped to lead, but the continent's needs remain much larger than any one organisation can meet.

A reinvigorated Alliance would bring governments, farmers, businesses, investors, researchers and development partners behind shared outcomes. AGRA

can contribute technical breadth, trusted relationships and catalytic resources; its partners bring mandates, legitimacy, specialised expertise, capital and delivery capability. Together, they can connect country priorities to expertise and investment, close the gaps between individual programmes and strengthen the institutions needed to sustain progress.

AGRA's contribution will be greatest when the changes it helps set in motion grow far beyond AGRA itself and endure. That is the promise of a reinvigorated Alliance.

AGRA's first 20 years helped rebuild foundations and put many of the elements of transformation in place. The next two decades must make those elements work together at a scale that raises incomes, creates good jobs, improves nutrition and resilience and allows Africa to prosper through its agrifood economy.



Introduction and context

Africa's agrifood sector has long been a source of innovation and remains central to the continent's economy. No other sector employs more people, accounts for more household spending or will do more to determine whether Africa can feed itself, create productive work for its fast-growing workforce and build shared prosperity.

Africa has the land and the people. We have the potential to feed not just our own citizens but to help create a secure global food system. This is the enormous prize now within our grasp.

— Kofi Annan, Chair of the Board, AGRA (2011)



About this report

AGRA's twentieth anniversary is a moment to take stock: to reflect on what has been achieved, what has fallen short, what has been learned, and how AGRA's role may need to evolve.

This is not a technical evaluation nor the announcement of a new strategy. In addition to reviewing the history and current state of the agrifood sector, the report situates AGRA's first two decades against the sector's backdrop, assessing what it set out to do, what contributions it made, and the challenges it faced.

Disclaimer: Views expressed by quoted individuals are their own and do not necessarily represent the views of AGRA or their affiliated institutions.

Africa's future depends on its agrifood systems

Few parts of Africa's economy touch as many lives as its agrifood systems. Agrifood systems account for almost two-thirds of all employment in Africa, and roughly a third of GDP flows through the sector.¹⁰ This includes work not only in crop and livestock production, forestry and fisheries, but also in the business of supplying inputs like seed or fertiliser, moving and processing food, and selling it to consumers. In addition to providing direct incomes and livelihoods, everyone depends on the sector for affordable and nutritious food.

No major region globally has industrialised without first raising farm productivity.¹¹ When farmers produce and earn more, families can afford better food, healthcare and education. Their spending supports local businesses, while increased production lowers food costs and stimulates demand across rural and urban economies. This is what the report means by agrifood system transformation: a more

productive, resilient and market-oriented food economy that raises farmer incomes, creates value beyond the farm, makes food more affordable and drives wider economic growth.

Since the food economy touches everyone – from farmers, to small business owners, to consumers – agrifood system transformation has unique power to generate broad-based prosperity. Indeed, evidence has shown that agricultural growth reduces poverty more effectively than growth in any other sector.¹²

Yet Africa's agrifood systems are not delivering at the scale the continent needs. Over 300 million people (one in five Africans) face hunger, and healthy diets are out of reach for many more households.¹³ African households spend about half their income on food, a higher share than any other region. This is not just due to lower incomes, but also to higher food prices.¹⁴ Furthermore, dependence on imports – for both staple foods and inputs like fertiliser – makes consumers particularly vulnerable to global supply shocks. These pressures emerge not only from low and volatile farm productivity, but also from weak links and investment across agrifood value chains.

The sector's future is also inseparable from climate and nature. Food production depends on healthy soils, reliable water and biodiversity, yet these resources are under growing pressure as cultivated land expands and the climate becomes more volatile. Africa's resilience in the years ahead will depend on how its resources are managed and how its food is produced.

With its diverse natural resources, a large and growing workforce, and access to modern science and technology, Africa has the means to transform its agriculture and food economies. Doing so would renew agriculture's long-standing role as a source of innovation, resilience and prosperity across the continent.

“
Africa can feed itself, and even export a lot. We have the land, we have the climate. The question is how we turn that potential into real production.

— Dr Nteranya Sanginga, former Director-General, IITA

Agriculture has long powered African economies and societies

Agricultural surplus has long powered civilisation and empire in Africa. In Nubia, farmers used animal-driven waterwheels to expand the Nile’s reach and feed its cities on two harvests per year. The inland Niger delta produced rice, sorghum and fish that sustained regional commerce far beyond the gates of Djenné-Djeno, one of West Africa’s earliest cities. Banana farming in the Great Lakes supported some of the densest rural populations on the continent, while cattle and grain underpinned the stone city of Great Zimbabwe.

African farmers achieved all this in some of the world’s most demanding environments, with homegrown innovations surviving for centuries. The Konso of southern Ethiopia farm steep hillsides on drystone terraces, holding soil that would otherwise have washed into the valleys.¹⁵ Across the Sahel, farmers grow crops beneath *Faidherbia albida*, a tree that sheds its leaves at the start of the rains, returning nitrogen without competing for sunlight.¹⁶

No continent has a richer heritage of indigenous grains. African farmers domesticated sorghum, pearl millet and their own species of rice, alongside teff, finger millet, fonio, yams and cowpeas. These crops were selected for widely variable drylands, wetlands and highlands across the continent’s diverse landscapes.

Modern science and technology have reshaped agriculture globally, but this history nevertheless reminds us that Africa’s present constraints do not stem from an absence of ingenuity or agricultural capability.

The legacy of under-investment

Africa entered the twenty-first century carrying the effects of several policy eras. Together, they left food production encumbered by insufficient research, infrastructure, investment, and institutional support.

Under colonial rule, investment concentrated on crops that earned foreign exchange, chiefly cocoa, coffee, cotton and tea, supported by research stations, railways, ports and marketing boards. Much of this infrastructure linked export-producing areas to ports, rather than connecting domestic and regional food markets. The food crops most households grew, such as cassava, yams and millet, received far less attention.¹⁷ After independence, many governments continued funding research, extension and irrigation around strategic crops. An example is the smallholder tea sector in Kenya which was supported through the Kenya Tea Development Authority.¹⁸

At the same time, states drew heavily on agriculture to fund the rest of the economy. In Ghana, for example, cocoa farmers received as low as 5% of the crop’s export value between 1975 and 1981 – with the rest captured by the state’s marketing board.¹⁹

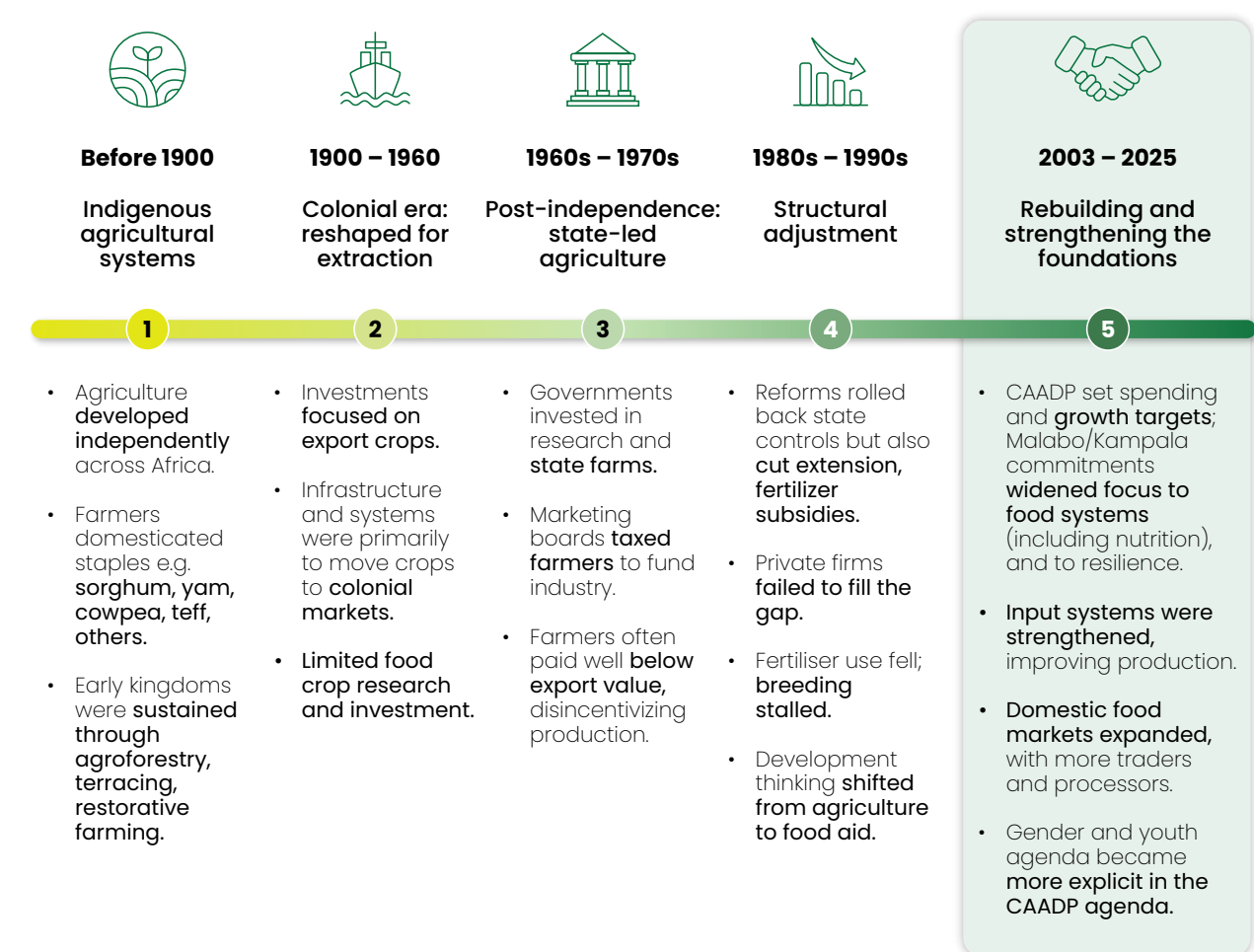
By the late 1970s, this reliance on farmers was reaching its limits. Structural adjustment in the 1980s and 1990s defunded many agricultural institutions: marketing boards were wound

down, fertiliser subsidies ended, and extension services were cut, on the assumption that private firms would fill the gap. Many farmers were left without buyers, inputs or advice. Fertiliser became unaffordable; farmers who had adopted improved varieties reverted to saved seed, and with research budgets cut, breeders could no longer produce new varieties.²⁰ In Côte d’Ivoire, for example, national public spending on agricultural research roughly halved between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s.²¹

Mainstream development thinking also came to place less weight on agriculture as a driver of growth, focusing instead on food aid and safety nets.²² Donor priorities followed: the share of official development assistance going to agriculture fell sharply, from about 18% in 1979 to around 3.5% by 2004, even as most of Africa’s poor still depended on farming.²³ In 2007, the World Bank’s own evaluators concluded that agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa had been neglected by governments and the donor community alike.²⁴ This was the inherited context in which African governments and their partners began rebuilding the sector in the early 2000s.

Exhibit 1

Eras that shaped African agriculture



Sources: National Research Council (1996); Anderson & Masters (2009); Bates (1981); AGRA (2008); Toenniessen, Adesina & DeVries (2008); Timmer (2009); Independent Evaluation Group (2007).

A uniquely African Green Revolution

A continental commitment

At the turn of the millennium, Africa’s leaders started to reassert the agriculture sector’s importance in continental and national agendas. Continental commitments were taking shape through the African Union’s New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and its agricultural framework, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

In 2004, Kofi Annan, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, gave a speech in Addis Ababa calling for a “uniquely African green revolution.” Building on recommendations from the InterAcademy Council, a global network of science academies, he called for the continent to adopt modern agricultural technology while putting smallholder farmers at the centre of the agenda. Recognising the vast diversity of contexts and needs across the continent, the council had concluded that African solutions would need to be at the forefront of a “rainbow of revolutions”.²⁵

In 2006, AGRA was founded to champion Annan’s call to action.²⁶ Two of the world’s largest philanthropies backed the vision: the Rockefeller Foundation, with funding and years of experience with African plant breeders, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, with significant additional funding. Both shared Annan’s conviction that Africa’s transformation had to be led by African institutions, built on African science and designed for African conditions.

The continental agenda continued to broaden in the decades that followed. The 2014 Malabo Declaration set the first explicit targets for women’s participation and youth

employment, and the 2025 Kampala CAADP Declaration took a holistic agrifood systems lens. Chapter 2 in this report tells the story of AGRA’s founding strategy and evolution in line with these continental commitments.

Inspiration from past Green Revolutions

In the second half of the twentieth century, countries across Asia and Latin America transformed their agrifood sectors and economies. Cereal production in the developing world roughly tripled between 1960 and 2000 on only about a third more land, and in Asia, extreme poverty roughly halved between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s, even as the population grew by 60%.²⁷

Each country followed a different route, but with common features. High-yielding varieties played a central role: semi-dwarf wheat developed in Mexico and adopted across South Asia; semi-dwarf and hybrid rice across Asia; and tropically adapted soybean in Brazil. Improved seed went hand in hand with large investments in fertiliser and irrigation, or other land improvements such as liming in Brazil’s tropical savanna Cerrado region.²⁸ Importantly, each model relied on sustained public commitment, policy reforms and capable institutions.

These Green Revolutions raised farm productivity, released labour and lowered the real cost of food, helping fuel broader industrialisation. They also carried costs that are better understood today. A narrow focus on staple cereals delivered calories but not always better nutrition; input-heavy monocropping degraded soils and drew down water tables; and gains often flowed unevenly, including between regions and across genders. Subsidies that brought early improvements sometimes hardened into fiscal burdens that were difficult to remove.²⁹

“At the core of our early conversations about AGRA was the conviction that Africa’s agricultural transformation had to be built and led from within the continent, not imported from outside. Twenty years later, that founding belief – in African scientists, African institutions, and African leadership – still rings true.

— Roy Steiner, Senior Vice President, The Rockefeller Foundation; Founding-era AGRA champion

Exhibit 2

Green Revolutions around the world

	Approach	Key technology	Outcome
 Mexico 1950s – 70s	Science-led input package - Seed, fertiliser and irrigation deployed as one packaged playbook - State-funded R&D and extension	Semi-dwarf high-yield wheat (CIMMYT)	3x Wheat production tripled
 India 1965 – 90	State-scaling of inputs - Roll out via state procurement (FCI) and guaranteed support prices - Fertiliser subsidies and canal irrigation expansion	Semi-dwarf wheat and rice (CIMMYT/IRRI)	2x Cereal yields doubled
 China 1978 – 2000	De-collectivisation and price reform - Restoration of incentives for family farms - Secure land tenure - Higher market prices via liberalisationexisting technology	Hybrid rice	76% → 12% Rural poverty collapsed
 Vietnam 1986 – 2005	Market liberalisation and trade - Doi Moi land-use rights and price reform, executed top-down - ASEAN integration	Improved rice varieties	#3 From net importer to top-three rice exporter
 Brazil 1970s – 2000s	Tropical Revolution - State-led R&D to adapt seeds to the tropics (Embrapa) - Liming of Cerrado opening vast interior to commercial farming	Tropically adapted soybean (Embrapa)	1.3 → 45m ha 35x soybean cultivation



“The ‘one size fits all’ approach that worked so well for the vast irrigated regions of Asia is simply not appropriate for the highly diverse rain-fed farming systems of Africa. What Africa needs has been called a ‘rainbow’ of crop improvement revolutions that combine productivity growth from many different crops and place greater emphasis on farmer participation, local adaptation, strengthening national and local institutions, and the building of agricultural value chains that enables farmers to generate profits from surplus production.

— Toenniessen, Adesina and DeVries (2008), *Building an Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa*

Africa’s unique conditions demanded a different approach

Africa could not simply import foreign models. Africa’s transformation needed to span many crops and livestock systems, mostly rainfed and spread across very different soils, climates and markets. Unlike the regions where earlier Green Revolutions took hold, much of Africa also lacked the irrigation, roads, power and market infrastructure that helped new technologies reach scale. It also needed

to raise productivity while improving nutrition and inclusion, protecting the natural resource base, and navigating growing climate and geopolitical pressure.

In practice, these differences pointed – and continue to point – to five design principles summarised in Exhibit 3. Together, these principles define what “uniquely African” means in this report: not one continental blueprint, but approaches adapted to different contexts.

Exhibit 3
Different conditions require a uniquely African approach

Five design principles for Africa's agrifood transformation

Features	Earlier agricultural transformation	Africa’s unique conditions	Design principles for Africa’s agrifood transformation
 Agronomic conditions	More uniform and often-irrigated production systems	Diverse, mostly rainfed production systems	Locally adaptive Adapt to local crops, risks and ecologies
 Production mix	Concentration on a few flagship cereals	Diverse food demand across fragmented markets	Market-anchored Start with demand and work backwards
 System complexity	Technology push a catalyst for transformation	Multiple, interconnected constraints across value chains	Systems-level Coordinate interventions across the whole value chain
 Inclusion	Centralised programmes and unevenly shared gains	Dispersed farmers and unequal access for women and youth	Participative and inclusive Design with farmers and enable women and youth to lead
 Institutions	Sustained commitment through capable institutions	Fragmented institutions and shifting policy priorities	Institution-building Build durable institutions, rules and political commitment

Twenty years on: Taking stock and opening a new era

Since 2000, agricultural GDP in Africa excluding North Africa has grown by about 4.4% a year, nearly twice the rate of the preceding three decades.³⁰ Seed and input systems have strengthened, more traders and processors connect farmers to markets, and about four-fifths of the food Africans eat is now purchased rather than grown at home. Yet these advances have not produced system-wide transformation. Productivity gains remain modest and vary widely across countries and crops. Much of the growth in output has come from cultivating more land, value addition beyond the farm has lagged, and the natural-resource base continues to erode. Farmer incomes remain low, more than 300 million Africans faced hunger in 2024, and agriculture has yet to drive the wider economic transformation once envisaged.

Africa now enters a more demanding but also more promising period. Its farmers, livestock keepers, fishers and food businesses serve a large and fast-growing home market. The

population is heading towards two billion and will become majority-urban around the mid-2030s, as demand shifts towards fresh, higher-value foods and those prepared beyond the farm.³¹ Science, digital tools and regional integration create new opportunities to invest and grow. But climate and natural-resource pressures are mounting, finance and development support are constrained, and geopolitical uncertainty is rising. The task is to meet growing demand sustainably while generating more income, jobs and investment within Africa.

As AGRA turns 20 in 2026, this report takes stock of both Africa’s unfinished transformation and AGRA’s own impact and learnings. It examines how the continent’s agrifood systems have changed, what AGRA has built and learned, and what the next two decades will require. This reflection informs the path forward for AGRA, and the roles it will play on the continent with renewed urgency.

Four questions guide the chapters that follow:

Chapter 1	What progress have Africa’s agrifood systems made over the past two decades, and why has transformation proved so hard?
Chapter 2	What has AGRA built, what impact has lasted, what fell short, and what lessons will it carry into the future?
Chapter 3	What will it take to change the trajectory of Africa’s agrifood systems over the next two decades?
Chapter 4	What is AGRA’s value proposition, and what roles could AGRA play going forward?

“Without the efforts to transform agrifood systems, there would have been far more poor and hungry people in Africa. The progress has not been as fast as we would like – but overall, the African agrifood system is being transformed. There is no doubt of it.

— Shenggen Fan, Dean, Academy of Global Food Economics and Policy (AGFEP), China Agricultural University; Board Member, AGRA





CHAPTER 1

Africa's unfinished agrifood system transformation

20 years ago, Africa's agrifood sector was still rebuilding. Since then, much progress has been made, but the envisaged transformation remains unrealised.

KEY MESSAGES

- 1. Two decades ago, when AGRA was founded, Africa's agrifood sector needed rebuilding.**

Food production per person was flat or falling, staple yields had barely moved, and research, extension, seed and input systems were weak across much of the continent. Agriculture had only recently started to re-emerge as a priority in mainstream growth agendas.
- 2. Africa has made real progress in building the foundations for agrifood transformation.**

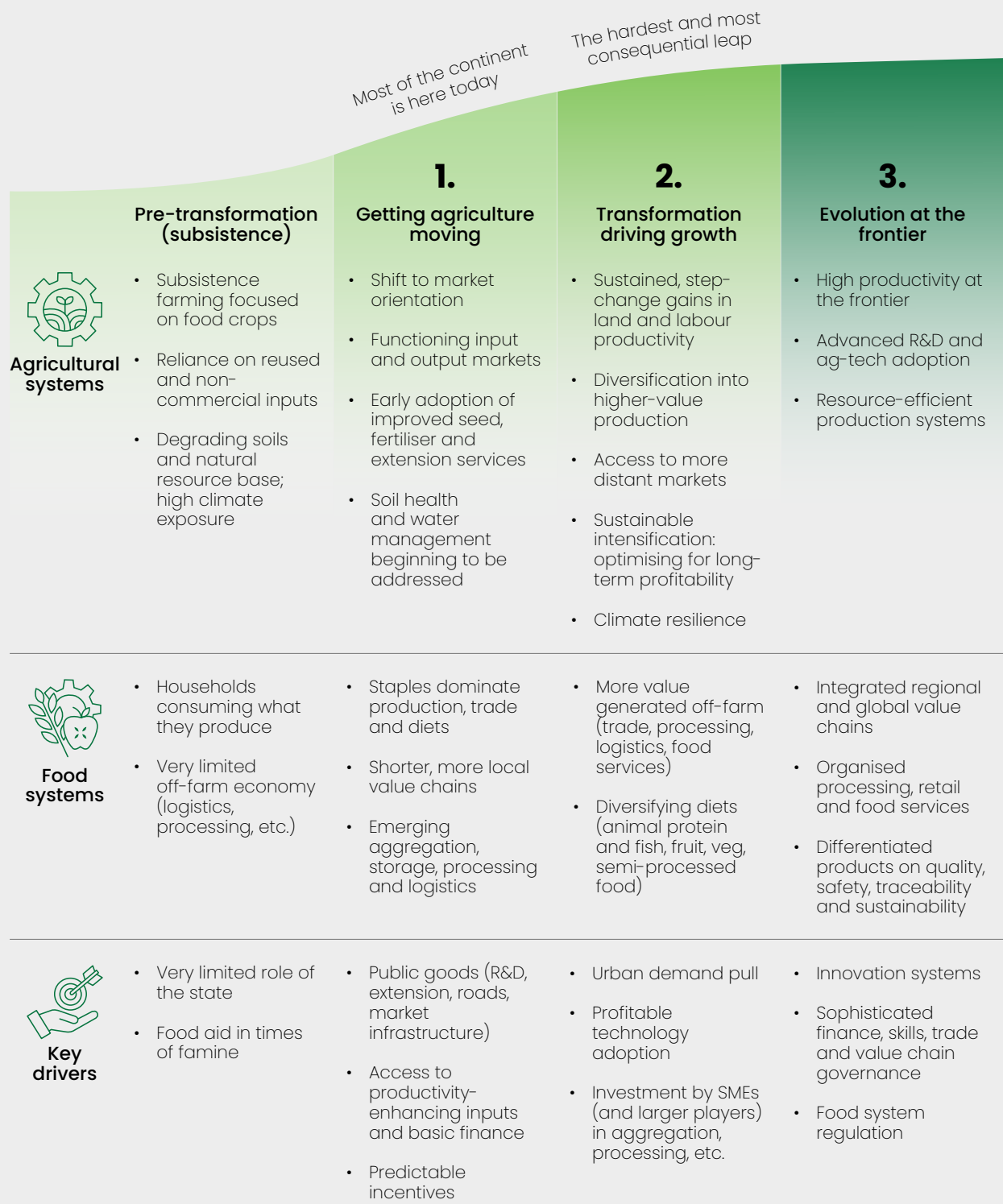
Seed systems and agro-dealer networks have expanded, policy and regulatory capacity has improved, and more businesses now buy, move and process food, connecting farmers to markets. Breakthroughs across countries and value chains show that transformation is possible when the right conditions come together and are sustained over time.
- 3. But progress has not yet produced system-wide transformation.**

Productivity gains remain modest and vary widely; much output growth has come from expanding cultivated land, while value addition beyond the farm has lagged. Labour is leaving agriculture before productivity rises enough to support better jobs elsewhere. Rising hunger, fragile food systems and growing dependence on food imports show the human and economic cost.
- 4. Progress has also been varied.**

Some countries and better-organised value chains have advanced further. Although input access has improved, women continue to experience unequal access and experience yield gaps of up to 25% compared to men.
- 5. Weaknesses across the wider agrifood system increasingly limit transformation.**

Infrastructure and research still need strengthening in many places, while poor coordination, political constraints and weak delivery hold back progress even where those foundations exist; state capacity has not kept pace with increasing complexity of the agrifood system.

Stages of agrifood system transformation



Source: Adapted from Timmer (1988; 2009); Diao et al (2024); Reardon & Minten (2021).

Stages of agrifood system transformation

Agricultural production and the wider food economy transform together. More productive farms lower food costs and raise disposable income, while urbanisation increases demand for higher-value and more diverse foods. Businesses that buy, move and process food connect farmers to that demand, encouraging further investment and production.³²

Transformation typically unfolds in phases, emerging from basic subsistence agriculture. In the first, the imperative is to get agriculture moving: raising the productivity of staple crops from a low base, where most of what is grown is eaten by the households that grow it.

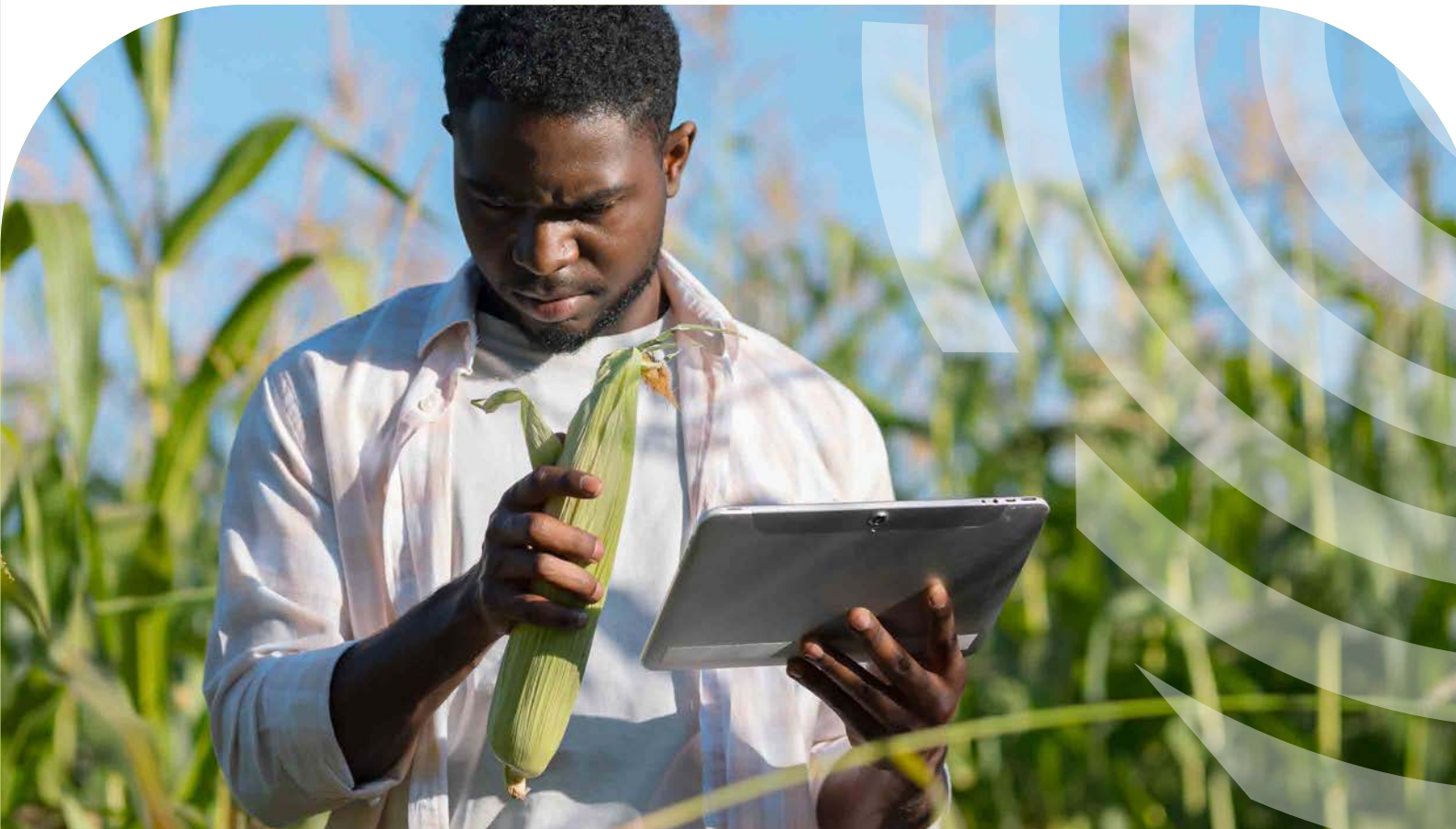
The second phase, in which agriculture begins to drive wider growth, brings the most dramatic change. As the agrifood sector grows, it accounts for a smaller share of GDP: rising incomes reduce the share of household budgets spent on food (Engel's law)³³, freeing income for other spending and allowing industry and services to grow faster. Agriculture moves from a sector in need of support to one that drives the wider economy.³⁴ This system-wide transformation

has proved difficult across most of Africa. The agrifood sector is more dynamic and commercial than often recognised, but gains in productivity and value addition remain insufficient to produce the structural transformation seen elsewhere.

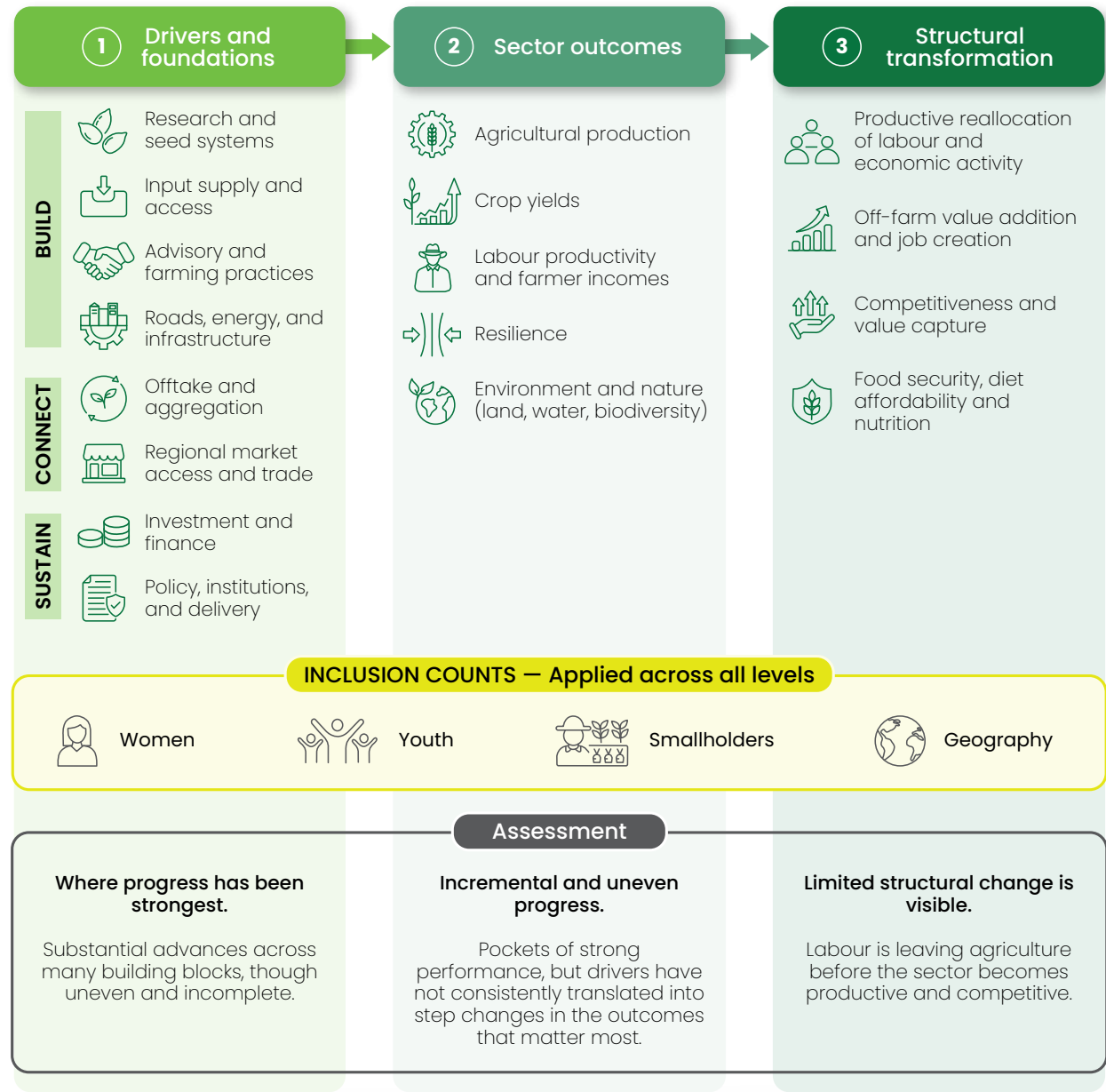
Evaluating agrifood system transformation

This chapter assesses how far Africa has progressed towards "transformation driving growth" using a three-stage framework examining the degree to which key drivers of transformation are in place, whether those drivers have improved sector outcomes, and whether outcomes have catalysed wider structural transformation. Exhibit 5 summarises the indicators.

Over the past 20 years, there has been significant progress in building the prerequisites for transformation. Sector outcomes have improved more slowly, with incremental gains rather than sustained increases in productivity and incomes at scale.



Drivers and outcomes of an agrifood transformation



A sector on the move: Progress on the drivers of transformation

In the mid-2000s, food production per person was flat or falling across much of sub-Saharan Africa. Cereal yields were rising slowly but remained low and varied widely across the continent³⁵, while the institutions needed to drive change had limited capacity and were chronically underfunded.

When agriculture returned to the agenda in the early 2000s, countries and donors justifiably focused on the first phase of transformation – “getting agriculture moving.” This required rebuilding and establishing the basic building blocks for growth to take hold:

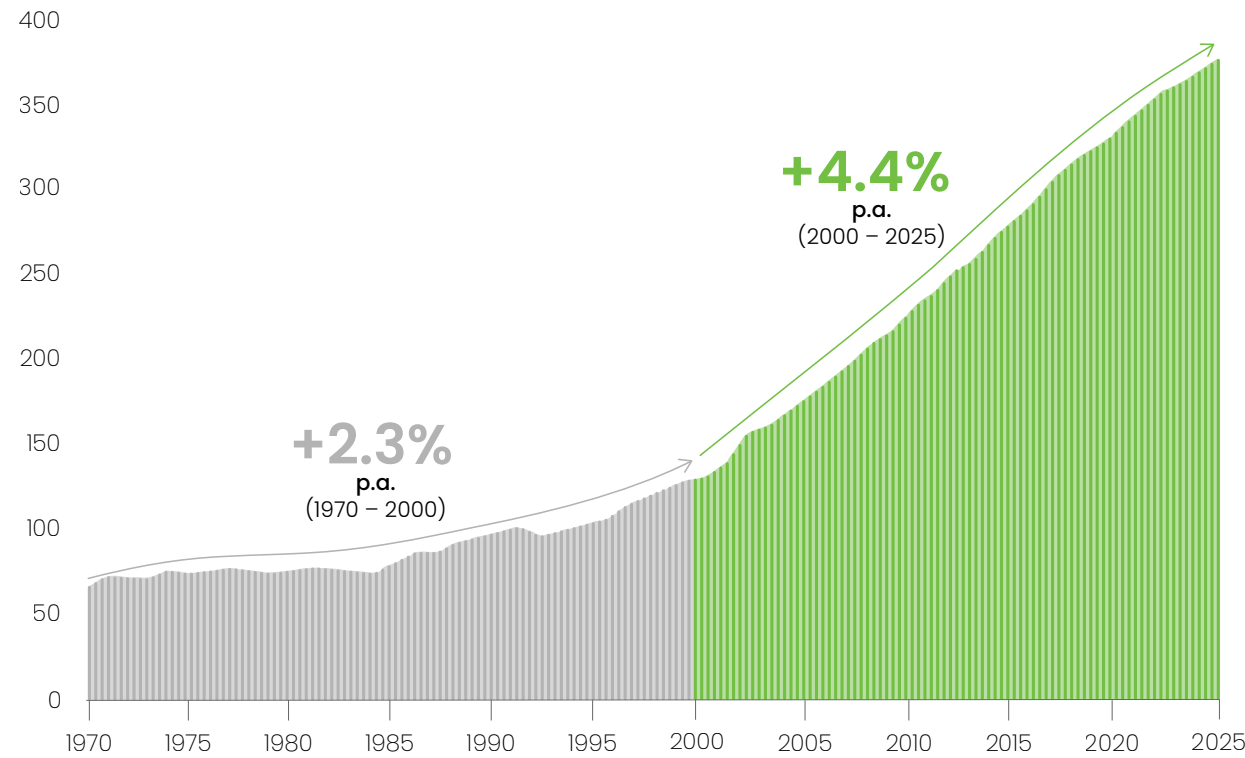
research, seed systems, access to fertiliser, and market access. Over time, the focus could shift towards system-level enablers such as finance, value-chain integration, digital services and regional trade.

The early 2000s marked a clear turning point in agricultural production. Until then, agricultural GDP grew by about 2.3% a year, below population growth of about 2.8%. In the 2000s, it accelerated to more than 4% a year (Exhibit 6).³⁶ This remained below CAADP’s 6% target, but meant the sector was finally growing in per capita terms.

Exhibit 6

Sub-Saharan Africa’s agriculture GDP growth accelerated in the 2000s

Agricultural Gross Value Added (sub-Saharan Africa), constant 2015 USD, billion



Agriculture systems: Building the foundations

Over the last twenty years, the greatest progress has been in building the foundations for farm-level productivity. Progress has been more mixed in expanding farmer finance and market access and in creating the investment and policy conditions needed to sustain transformation. Exhibit 7 provides a snapshot across these drivers.

Across most of the continent, farmers today have much improved access to quality seeds and other inputs. Breeding programmes and national research systems are more capable, and the private seed and input industry has grown around them. In AGRA-supported countries, supply of certified seed, which was non-existent in some places, is up seventy-fold. Millions of farmers receive bundled inputs, credit, and advice through organisations like One Acre Fund and Babban Gona that did not exist 20 years ago.

Farmers today also have stronger access to markets, enabled by a dynamic SME economy of traders and small-scale processors who move products from the farm to the city. Although intra-regional agricultural trade has not yet taken off, the African Continental Free Trade Area’s (AfCFTA) Agri-Trade Action Plan provides the policy foundations for developing food corridors in the years ahead.³⁷

The investment landscape has also changed dramatically. Twenty years ago, agriculture was viewed primarily as a development sector. Today, specialist venture capital and private equity funds invest in the agrifood economy, and some of Africa’s leading industrialists are betting on its future. Aliko Dangote began as an importer of food products such as sugar and rice; he is now heavily invested in African fertiliser, rice and sugar production. Banks such as Equity Group in the Great Lakes region are also shifting their portfolios towards agricultural value chains.

Twenty years ago, CAADP’s Maputo commitments were new. Only a few countries currently meet them, but most now have investment plans or compacts, often supported by partners such as the World Bank or AfDB, that frame national priorities for

agrifood transformation. National regulatory frameworks, including for seed certification and traceability, have also strengthened.

Much of this progress has occurred despite weak and underfunded institutions. Improvements in drivers of transformation, such as seed access, have not consistently produced higher yields and incomes, and total investment flows have not significantly changed as a share of the economy. Even so, today’s agrifood sector is radically different, with more of the building blocks for transformation in place.

Food systems: Growing and diversifying consumer demand

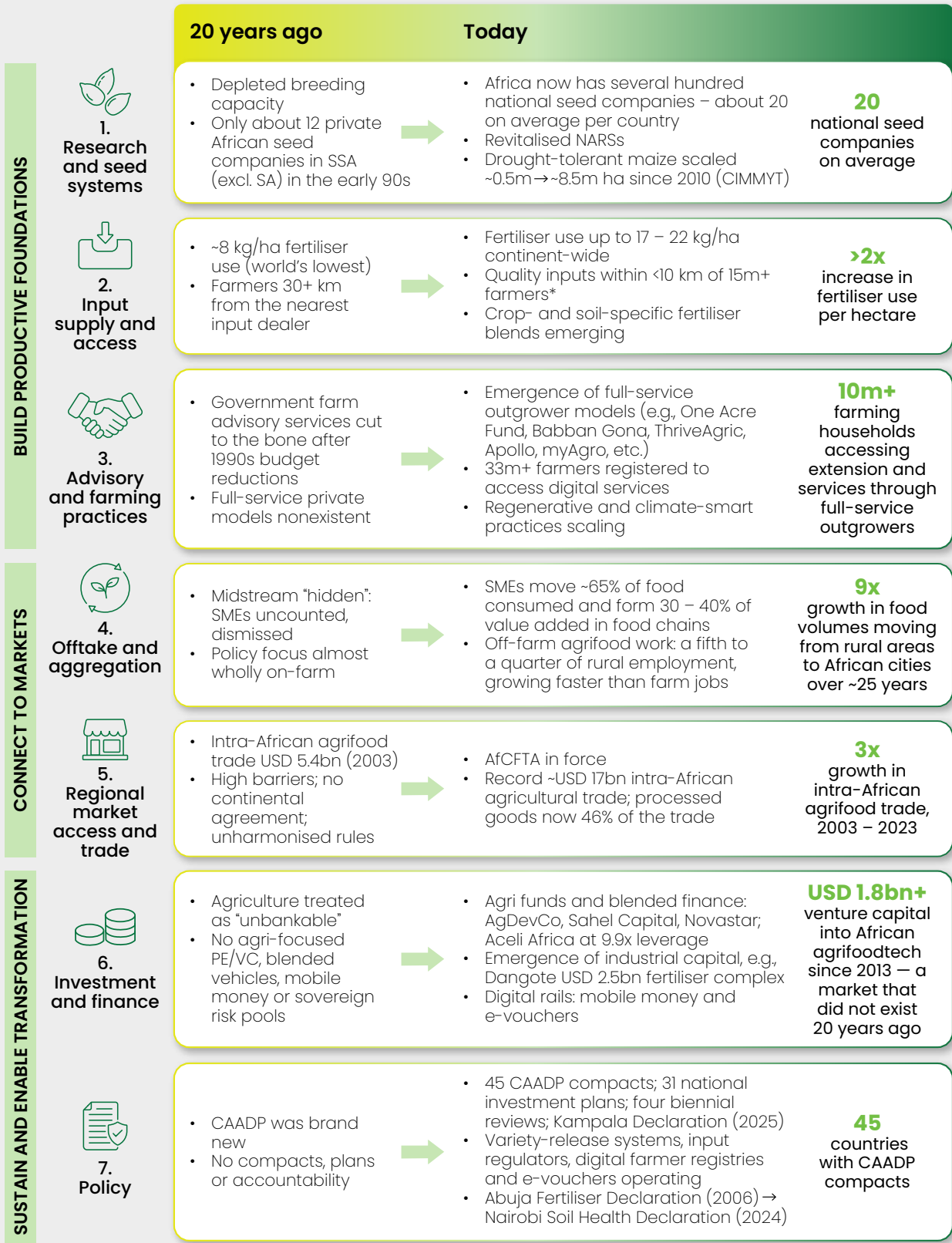
Alongside progress in agriculture systems, other parts of the food system have begun to transform. The shift in what, and how, people eat creates the demand that, in turn, can fuel further investment in agricultural production.

About four-fifths of the food Africans eat is now purchased rather than grown at home, showing how far the continent has moved beyond subsistence.³⁸ Rapid urbanisation underlies this shift: in 2005, just over a third of Africans lived in cities; today about 45% do. Population growth and urban migration have roughly doubled Africa’s urban population, adding more than 300 million people in 20 years.³⁹ Cities now account for about two-thirds of the food produced, far more than their share of the population.⁴⁰ More than half of urban food spending goes to food processed or prepared beyond the farm, while fresh, perishable foods account for a growing share. This demand creates opportunities for farmers to move into higher-value production.⁴¹

Household spending across the continent is also shifting towards animal products, fruits, and vegetables. Although grains and tubers continue to make up a large share of caloric intake, consumers spend most of their food budget on other categories. Meat provides only 5% of calories but accounts for about a third of food spending. These patterns point to growing opportunities on the continent in horticulture, poultry, dairy, red meat, and aquaculture.⁴²

Exhibit 7

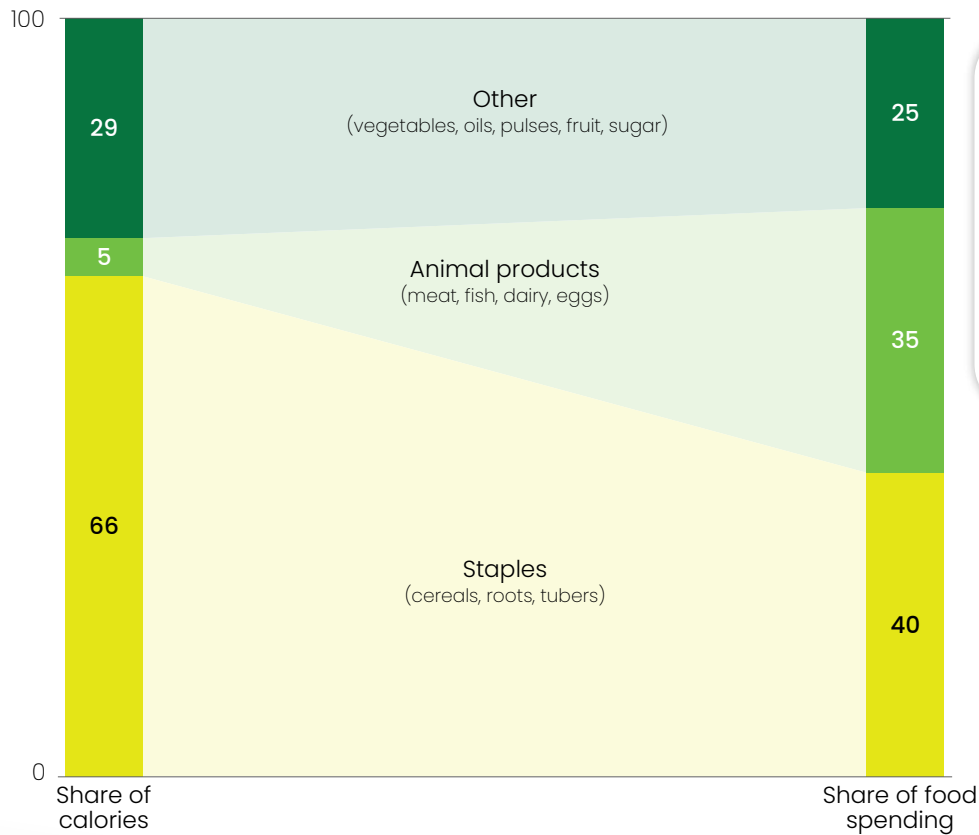
A sector on the move: Twenty years of progress on the drivers of transformation



Source: AGRA (2020, 2021); World Bank (WDR 2008); Abuja Declaration on Fertilizer (2006); FAOSTAT; CIMMYT; One Acre Fund (2025); Apollo Agriculture (2025); Mastercard Foundation; CTA & Dalberg (2019); Reardon (2015); Reardon et al. (2021); Reardon & Minten (2021); AGRA Africa Agriculture Status Report (2019); AKADEMIYA2063 & IFPRI, Africa Agriculture Trade Monitor (2023–25); AfCFTA Secretariat; Aceli Africa (2024); AgFunder (2023); company disclosures; AU/CAADP Biennial Review; ReSAKSS; Kampala CAADP Declaration (2025); Nairobi Declaration on Fertilizer and Soil Health (2024); AU Seed Sector Status Report (2021).
*10m+ (row 3) reflects company-reported annual reach across One Acre Fund (5.9m), Apollo (0.4m+), ThriveAgric, Babban Gona, myAgro and peers. Reference years vary by indicator.

African consumers now spend a majority of their food wallet on non-staples

Share of calories vs share of food spending, Sub-Saharan Africa, %



The hidden middle and non-staple value chains are where growth and farmer incomes increasingly sit, food policy can no longer be framed mainly around cereals.

Breakthroughs: Proof that transformation is happening and possible

USD 1bn+

Kenya's horticulture sector now earns this much annually from exports.

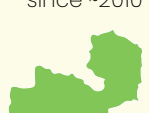
Progress remains gradual across much of the continent, but a handful of countries and value chains have moved much faster. Since 2017, Ethiopia has raised wheat output by about a quarter to 6.2 million tonnes by 2024, through a state-led push that brought nearly one million hectares under irrigated wheat.⁴³ Rwanda tripled maize production and doubled cassava output over 15 years of consistent backing for its national plan.⁴⁴ Kenya's horticulture sector, supplied mostly by smallholder contract farmers, now earns over USD 1 billion a year in exports. Côte d'Ivoire now produces about 40% of world cashew supply and has expanded processing capacity fivefold, creating more than 18,000 jobs.⁴⁵ Zambia's soybean output rose from under 10,000 tonnes in the early 2000s to about

760,000 tonnes in 2023, making it a leading regional producer and feeding a more competitive poultry sector.⁴⁶

Several lessons emerge from these examples:

- Transformation is possible.**
Ethiopia's progress was state-directed; Kenya's was more market-driven. Each represents transformation within a particular value chain or geography, rather than economy-wide structural change, but shows a path towards that longer-term goal.
- Breakthroughs require more than one intervention.**
Better seed alone did not do it, nor did more credit or a new road. Each case brought together inputs, farming, processing and market access. This helps explain why progress in individual areas has not yet produced transformation across the continent.
- Transformation takes sustained investment and coordination.**
No single actor could have delivered these breakthroughs, nor could any have been achieved within one project or electoral cycle. Progress depended on commitment and investment over many years, supported by governments that either led consistently or enabled others to act.

Examples of significant progress

Case example	Impact	What it took
 ETHIOPIA 2019 – now  State-led wheat drive	- Wheat output up ~25%, from ~4.9m t (2017) to ~6.2m (2024) ~1m ha of new irrigated 'cluster' wheat added from a standing start	- State-directed drive over 5+ years as a flagship priority - Large investment in irrigation - Cluster farming with input packages and extension
 RWANDA 2008 – now  Staple intensification	- Maize yields up ~2.5x, from ~0.7 t/ha (2007) to ~1.8 t/ha (2024) - Cassava and beans about doubled (2008 to 2023) - Farm output grew ~5% a year, sustained across 15 years	15+ years of consistent political leadership - Land consolidation, input subsidies, extension and storage as one stack - Donors aligned behind a single national plan
 KENYA Scale-up since 1990s  Horticulture exports	- Over USD 1bn a year in exports (about USD 1.2bn in 2023), a top foreign-exchange earner - Roughly 70 to 80% grown by smallholders, many on contract	- Public goods: phytosanitary inspection, cold chain, airport capacity - Stable enabling environment - Private exporters scaled into demanding EU markets
 CÔTE D'IVOIRE 2013 – now  Cashew value addition	- Raw output up from 380k to 1.2m t; ~40% of world supply - Local processing grew ~5x, to over 25% of the crop 18k+ jobs, two-thirds held by women	- Trade-policy reform and public-private coordination - Dedicated regulator and interprofessional body - Sustained ministerial leadership; processing-zone and road investment
 ZAMBIA Scale-up since ~2010  Soybean commercialization	- Output up ~7x since 2010, to ~760k t in 2023 (weather-sensitive) - Now a leading regional producer and net exporter (~half sold abroad)	- Demand pull from poultry-feed and vegetable-oil industries - Crushing/processing capacity grew ~8x (2010 to 23) - Input subsidies (soy added to FISP ~2014) on a commercial-farm base

Source: FAOSTAT; USDA FAS; World Bank; Kenya Horticultural Crops Directorate. Figures rounded; latest available year.

Africa’s agrifood transformation gap – and its consequences

Africa’s agrifood system has changed substantially over the past twenty years, and breakthroughs across the continent show that transformation is possible. Yet progress has not produced the system-wide change needed to generate broad-based prosperity and self-reinforcing growth. Most African countries still need to move from “getting agriculture moving” to “transformation driving growth.”

Three interconnected transitions remain incomplete. First, production has expanded without a take-off in yields. Second, labour is moving out of agriculture before a “productivity dividend” has materialised to fuel growth in other parts of the economy. Finally, Africa’s fast-growing food demand has not

yet contributed to industrialisation at the scale possible. Together, these gaps carry visible consequences for the continent.

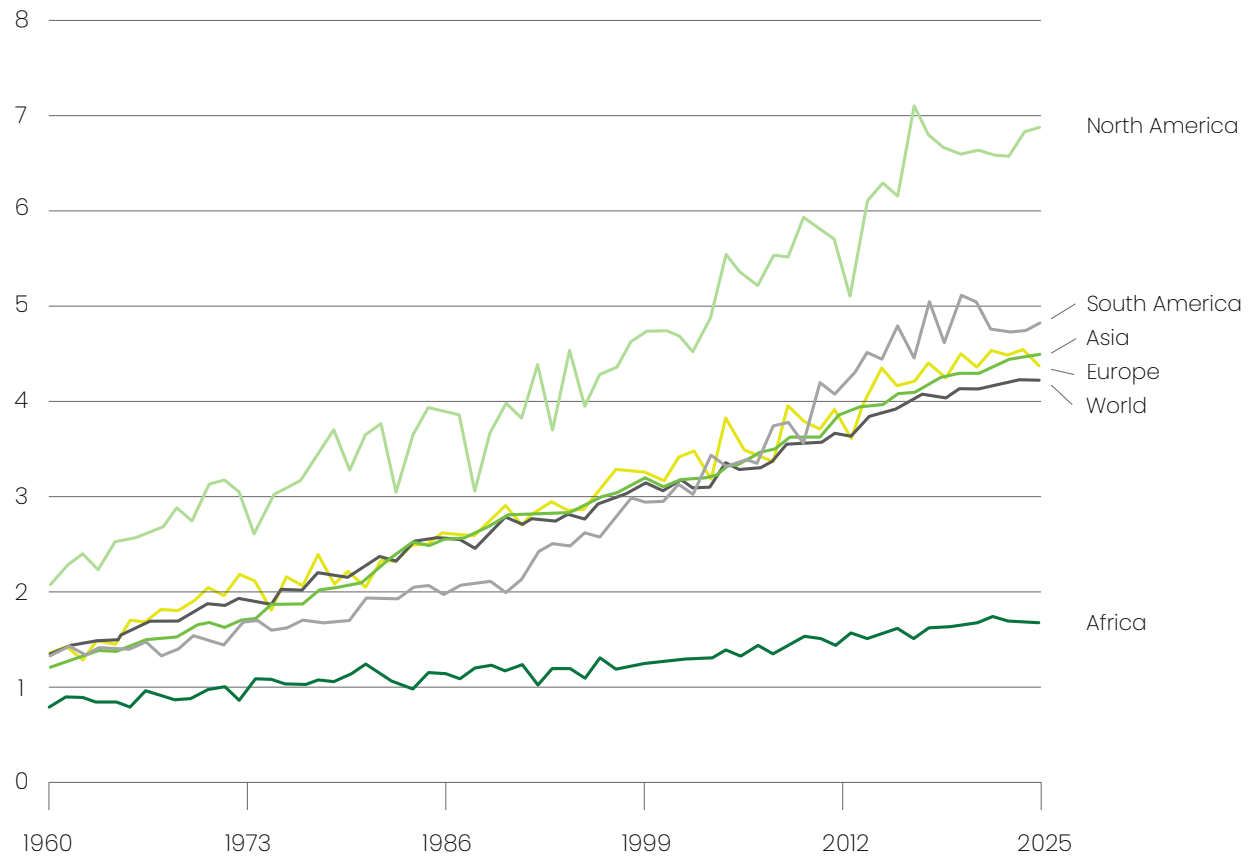
Gap 1: Production expanded without a take-off in yields

Average cereal yields remain far below those of other regions, and have risen only gradually, from about 1.1 tonnes per hectare in the mid-1980s to roughly 1.3 tonnes per hectare in 2005, around 2 tonnes below the global average. By 2024, yields had improved slowly to about 1.7 tonnes per hectare, but the gap had widened to about 2.5 tonnes per hectare, leaving the continent’s farmers less productive and less competitive.

Exhibit 10

Africa’s productivity and competitiveness in cereals falling further behind

Cereal yields by region (composite; MT/ha)



For some farmers, the continental average masks an even weaker picture. A landmark World Bank survey of 55,000 smallholder farms across six countries found that average crop yields in its sample fell by roughly 3.5 to 4% a year between 2008 and 2019, with wide variation across countries.⁴⁷

Low yields help explain why production growth has relied heavily on bringing more land into cultivation. Cereal production almost tripled over three decades, but only in small part due to improved yields; the area planted more than doubled, while yields rose by only about one third.⁴⁸ By contrast, the Green Revolutions described in the report's introduction achieved most of their cereal-output growth with low net land conversion.

Parts of Africa have abundant land, but expanding cropland cannot remain the main source of agricultural growth. It erodes forests, plains, soils and water, along with the habitats, pollinators and carbon stores on which agriculture depends. Agricultural expansion is the leading driver of forest loss in Africa, which loses more forest each year than any other region.⁴⁹ In other regions, land pressure encouraged sustainable intensification. In Africa, this expansion is instead degrading land and depressing yields, placing production in competition with biodiversity and sometimes contributing to conflict over land and resources.⁵⁰

“**[Farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria] is about competition for limited land, it's not about ethnicity or religion.**

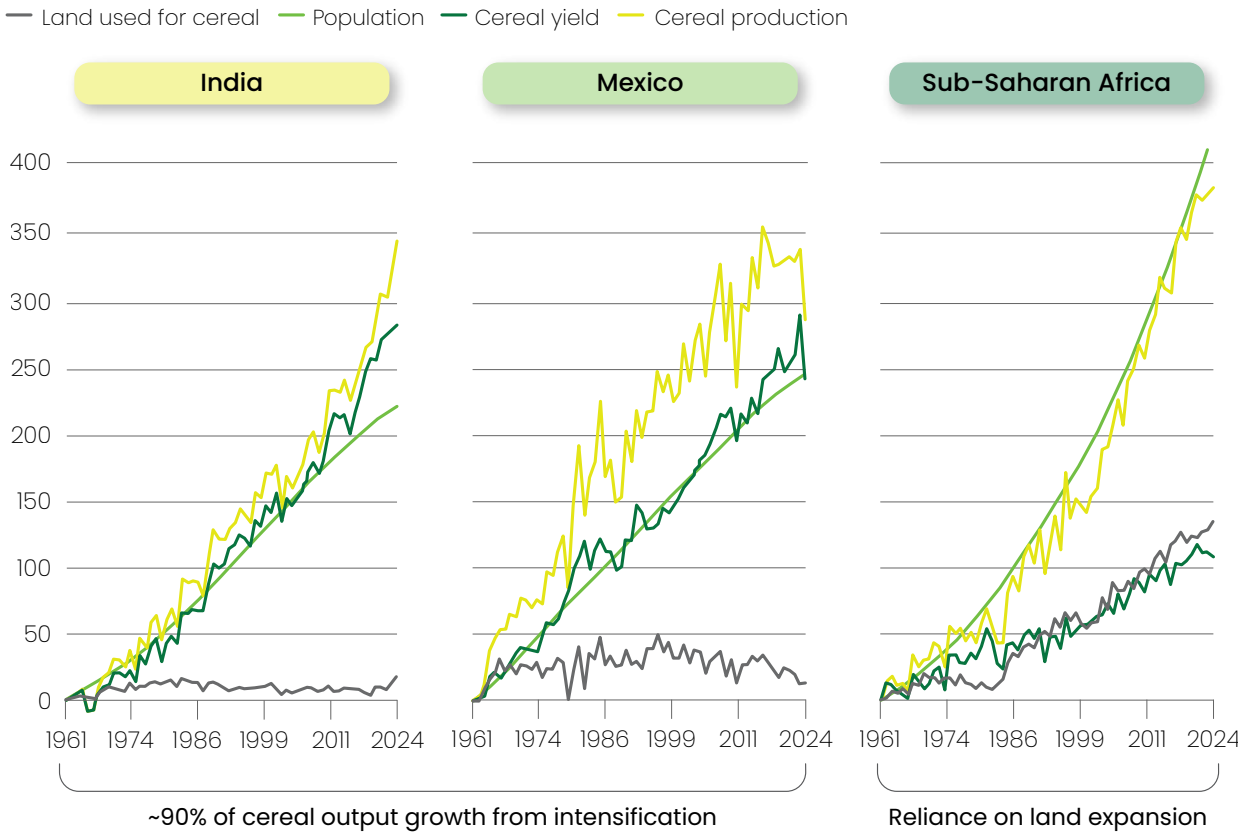
— **Baba Othman Ngelzarma**, National Secretary, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders' Association of Nigeria⁵¹



Exhibit 11

Africa stands out for production growth driven by land expansion, not just yield

Changes in population, cereal production, cereal yield and land used, 1961 – 2024, %



Source: Our World in Data; FAO (2025); HYDE (2023); Gapminder (2022); UN WPP (2024).

Gap 2: Labour is leaving agriculture before a productivity dividend

In a structural transformation, rising farm productivity allows fewer workers to produce more food, releasing labour for more productive work off the farm and raising rural incomes. Past agricultural transformations therefore fuelled industrialisation in two ways: they supplied workers to industry and increased rural demand for goods and services. Paradoxically, agriculture's success made it a smaller share of the overall economy.⁵²

This challenge is becoming more acute as Africa's labour force expands. More than 10 million young people enter the labour market each year, while only about 3 million formal wage jobs are currently created. Without faster growth in productive work, within the

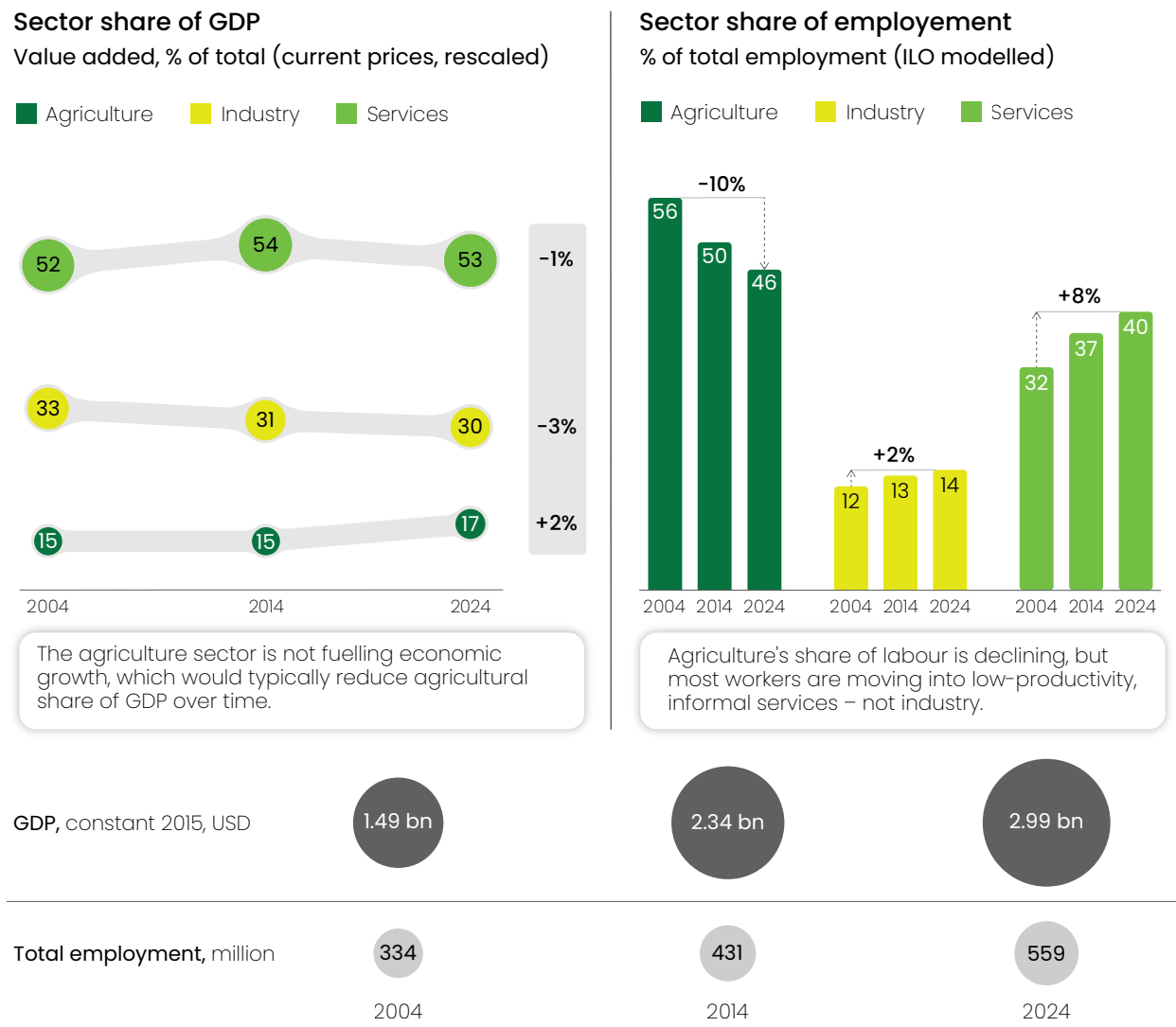
agrifood economy as well as beyond it, demographic growth will add to the pressure already visible as workers move into low-productivity informal services.

Across much of the continent, agriculture's share of GDP is stable or rising, the opposite of what structural transformation would normally produce. Agriculture's share of employment has fallen from 56% to 46% over the past 20 years, but workers are leaving before a productivity dividend is realised. Rather than moving into manufacturing, most enter informal services that add little to incomes or wider economic growth. Agricultural GDP per worker has risen by about 2% a year, slower than growth in per capita income across the wider economy and the corresponding global rate. The gap between African farmers and their global peers is widening.

Today, an African farm worker generates just USD 1,500 of production value per year – roughly a quarter of the economy-wide average, and 40% of what farm workers in peer emerging markets produce.⁵³ That

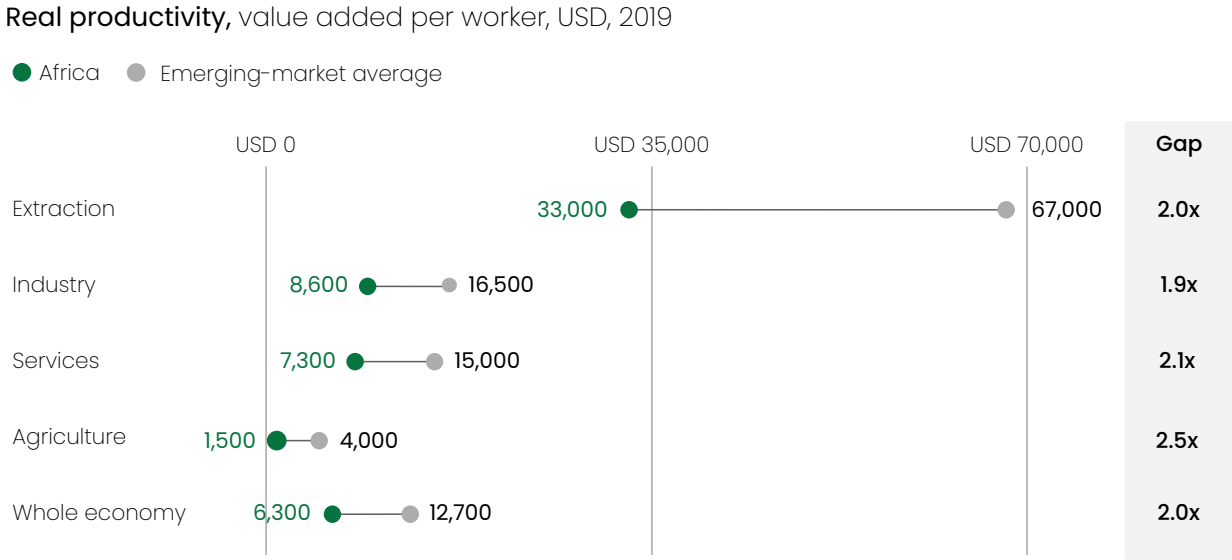
2.5x gap to peers is the widest of any sector. Besides being Africa’s least productive sector, agriculture is also the furthest from its potential.

Exhibit 12
Workers are leaving agriculture, but industry is not absorbing them



Source: Africa, 54 countries. GDP shares rescaled to sector value added as % of total VA. World Bank WDI (Aug 2026); analysis in accompanying workbook.

Exhibit 13
African agriculture’s productivity gap is the widest of any sector



Note: Values are approximate; emerging markets are middle.
Source: Adapted from McKinsey Global Institute (2023); MGI Africa Productivity Model (for Africa) and MGI Productivity Analytics database (for peers).

“**When I look at the smallholder farmers in my village, their lives have not improved dramatically. I want someone to show me a farmer who can grow one acre of maize and earn USD 3,000. That is the kind of transformation we should be pursuing – through higher-value crops, irrigation, productivity and assured markets.**

— Betty Kibaara, Director, Rockefeller Foundation Africa



Gap 3: Urban demand has not translated into enough domestic value addition and productive jobs

Low farm productivity and workers leaving agriculture too soon are only part of Africa's incomplete transformation. Its large and increasingly commercial food market should also attract investment into processing, distribution and other activities beyond the farm, creating the better jobs those workers need. Cities already account for a disproportionate share of demand, while spending is shifting towards fresh and higher-value foods.⁵⁴

This demand should drive faster growth in value addition and logistics than in farming itself. A thriving food economy would create jobs for young people while giving farmers stronger incentives to diversify into higher-value production and invest in yields and quality.

Yet the food economy beyond the farm, though expanding, is not achieving its potential. Across 17 African countries, its contribution to agrifood GDP only grew by 1% between 2009 and 2019, and still accounts for 40% of the total GDP.⁵⁵ Unreliable farm supply, costly transport and power, scarce working capital and unpredictable policy make investment risky, particularly when imports can meet urban demand. Agro-processing accounts for just 12 to 15% of Africa's agrifood GDP, compared with more than 60% in developed regions.⁵⁶ Even in competitive value chains such as cocoa and cashew, raw products often leave the continent before much value is added.

The result is an agrifood economy that has yet to generate the productivity, jobs and broad-based growth its scale should support.

The consequences of unfinished transformation

A paradox remains: despite abundant arable land and a large farming workforce, African agriculture is not yet feeding the continent or supporting prosperity at the scale required.

The consequences of Africa's transformation gap are visible in three areas: rising hunger and unaffordable, insufficiently nutritious diets; vulnerable food systems exposed to shocks; and imports displacing domestic production and value addition.

Hunger is rising, and healthy diets are out of reach

Africa reduced the number of people going hungry through the 2000s, but the trend has since reversed. Both the prevalence and the number of undernourished people have risen, even as hunger has fallen globally, leaving the continent further from the CAADP 2030 goal of ending it.

Affordability compounds the problem. A healthy diet costs USD 4.37 per person per day in purchasing-power-parity terms in sub-Saharan Africa, and roughly two-thirds of people cannot afford it.⁵⁷ Since 2017, the cost has risen by more than 40%, while real income per person has remained broadly flat. Poor diets have lasting effects: in West and Central Africa alone, the number of stunted children rose from 23 million to 28 million between 2000 and 2016.⁵⁸

Food systems remain fragile

Most African farming depends on rainfall, so a failed season can quickly bring hunger and leave families unable to pay school fees or buy seed for the next season, making recovery even harder. Low financial reserves, limited social protection and underdeveloped insurance leave households and governments with limited ways to cope. With the continent highly exposed to droughts, floods, conflict and swings in global prices, vulnerable populations can quickly be pushed into crisis and deeper poverty.

Irrigation is one of the most effective buffers, but only a small share of agricultural land is equipped for it, and insurance reaches few farmers. Losses are therefore borne directly by households, agribusinesses and public budgets.

Exhibit 14

The number of hungry Africans is rising again, even as the population share holds roughly flat

Number of undernourished people (million)

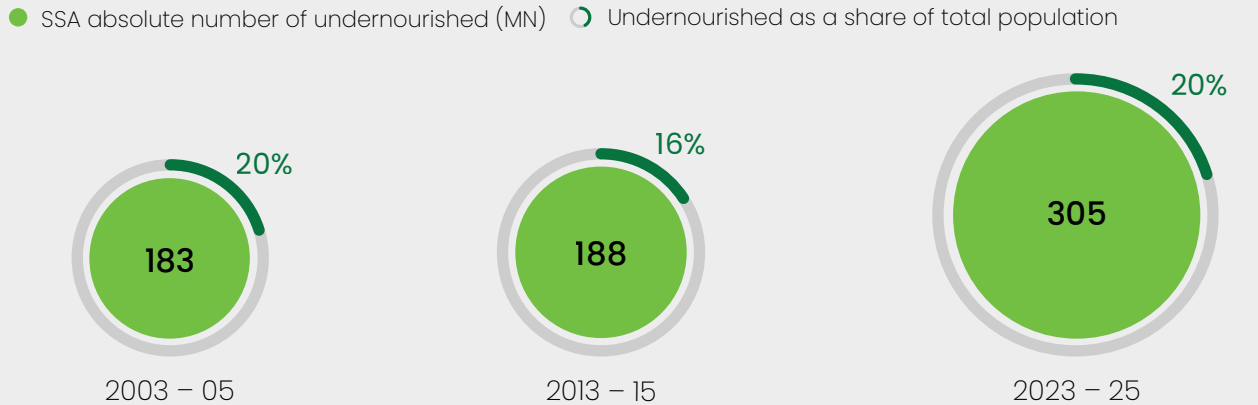
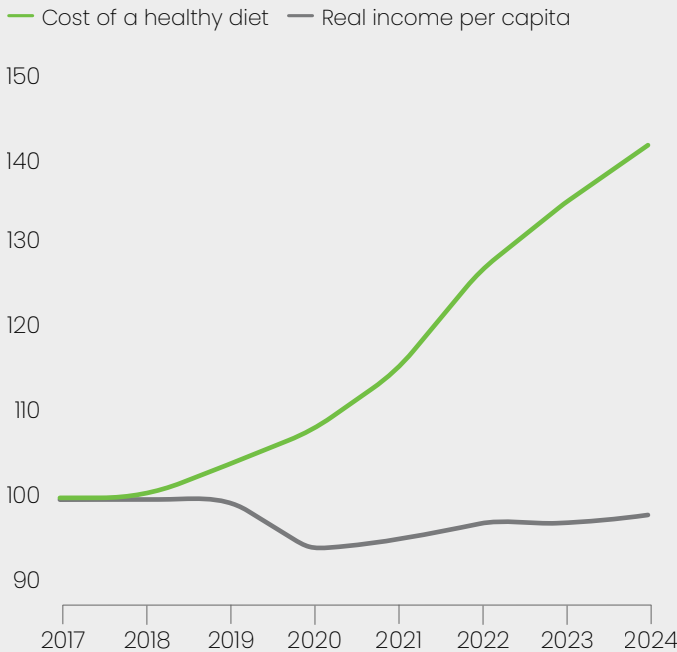


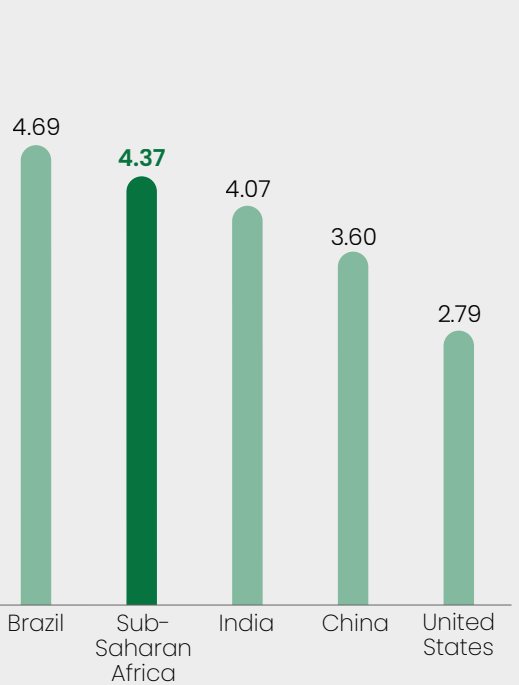
Exhibit 15

Affordability of healthy diets

Change in the cost of a healthy diet versus change in real income per capita; sub-Saharan Africa



Daily cost of a healthy diet, 2024 (PPP USD per person)



“**The potential to increase irrigation in Africa is high ... irrigated land could be expanded to 38 million hectares, up from the current 7.7 million.**

— Malabo Montpellier Panel, 2018⁵⁹



Rising imports expose vulnerability and highlight a missed opportunity

Imports are not in themselves a sign of failure and remain important to food security. The concern is the pace and composition of Africa's growing dependence. The continent increasingly relies on external supplies of major staples, while more of the income, jobs and investment generated by its expanding food market go elsewhere.

Africa's food-import bill reached about USD 65 billion in 2025, up from roughly USD 35 billion a decade earlier. Cereals, including wheat and rice, accounted for around a third of the total.⁶⁰

Where imports cost less than local production, or domestic supply falls short, trade helps keep food available and affordable. But persistent weaknesses in competitiveness, processing and regional trade mean that rising demand creates less income, employment and investment within Africa than it could. Dependence on imports also leaves households and governments more exposed to global price spikes, exchange-rate pressures and supply disruptions.

Different country and value chain realities

So far, the story of Africa's agrifood system transformation journey has largely been told in continental generalisations and averages. In reality, countries and value chains vary significantly in their transformation trajectories and needs.

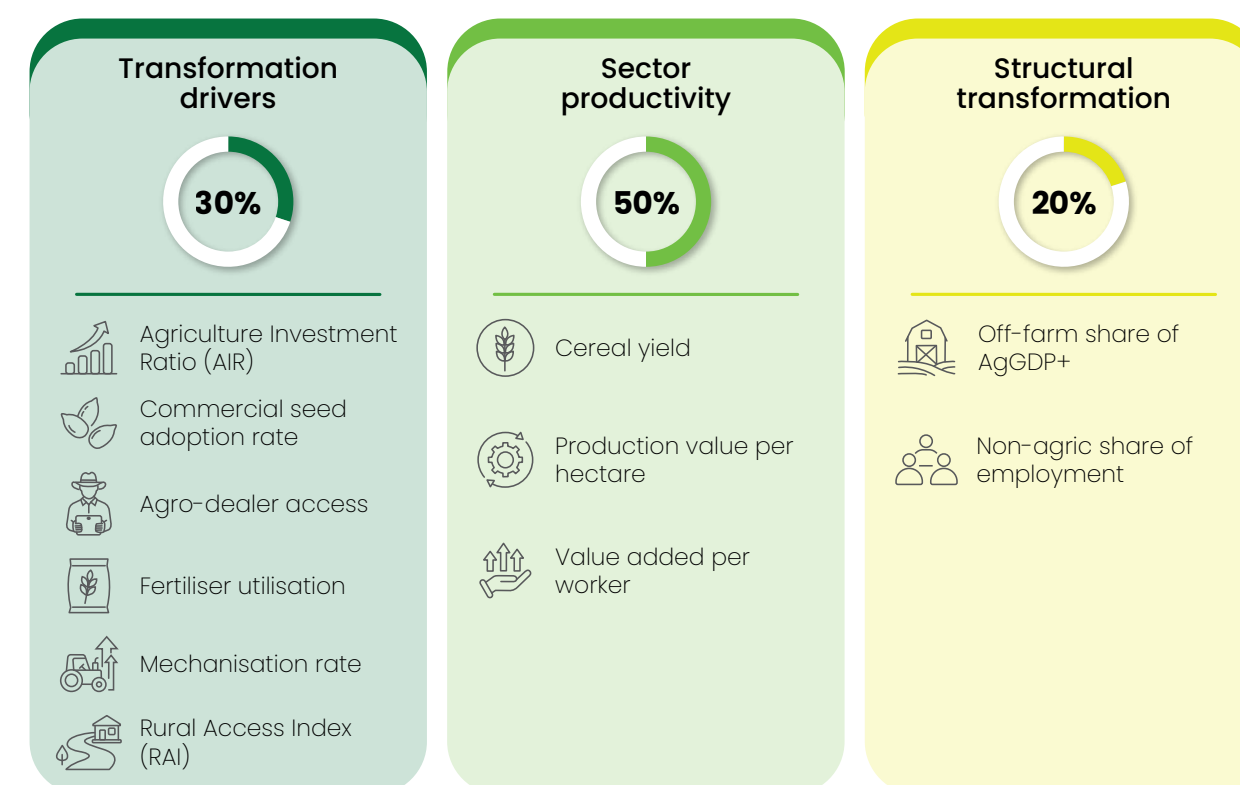
Most countries have moved forward, but few have reached take-off

To compare national trajectories with the classic stages of agrifood transformation, AGRA constructed an "Agrifood System Performance Score" covering 11 indicators across its drivers and outcomes. Countries are benchmarked against continental and global peers to provide an approximate indication of their stage of transformation. The index is an exploratory tool for comparing performance across a focused set of dimensions, not a country scorecard like the CAADP Biennial Review. It also does not assess how inclusive or sustainable each country's path is.

According to the Transformation Index, only four of 36 countries assessed (South Africa, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia) have achieved sufficiently high levels of productivity and structural economic change to sit in the "Transformation Driving Growth" band. These countries do not have fully industrialised agriculture and food systems, but they have transitioned to economies where high-performing primary agriculture sectors became smaller shares of the overall economy.

Most countries sit in the "Getting Agriculture Moving" stage of agrifood system transformation, and almost all countries have advanced significantly over the last twenty years. Based on this data, eight countries graduated from more subsistence-oriented and informal agriculture sectors over the last 20 years. Across countries, however, performance varies widely.

Three sets of indicators included in the Agrifood System Performance Score, with each set's weighting



The data suggests where countries at different stages need to focus. Those still in the pre-transformation phase need to continue building basic research, input, advisory, infrastructure and institutional systems, the foundations on which further progress depends. For countries in the broad middle, the challenge is increasingly to make these components work together: ensuring that technology adoption is profitable, connecting production to demand and sustaining finance, policy and delivery long enough for progress to build. A composite score cannot identify

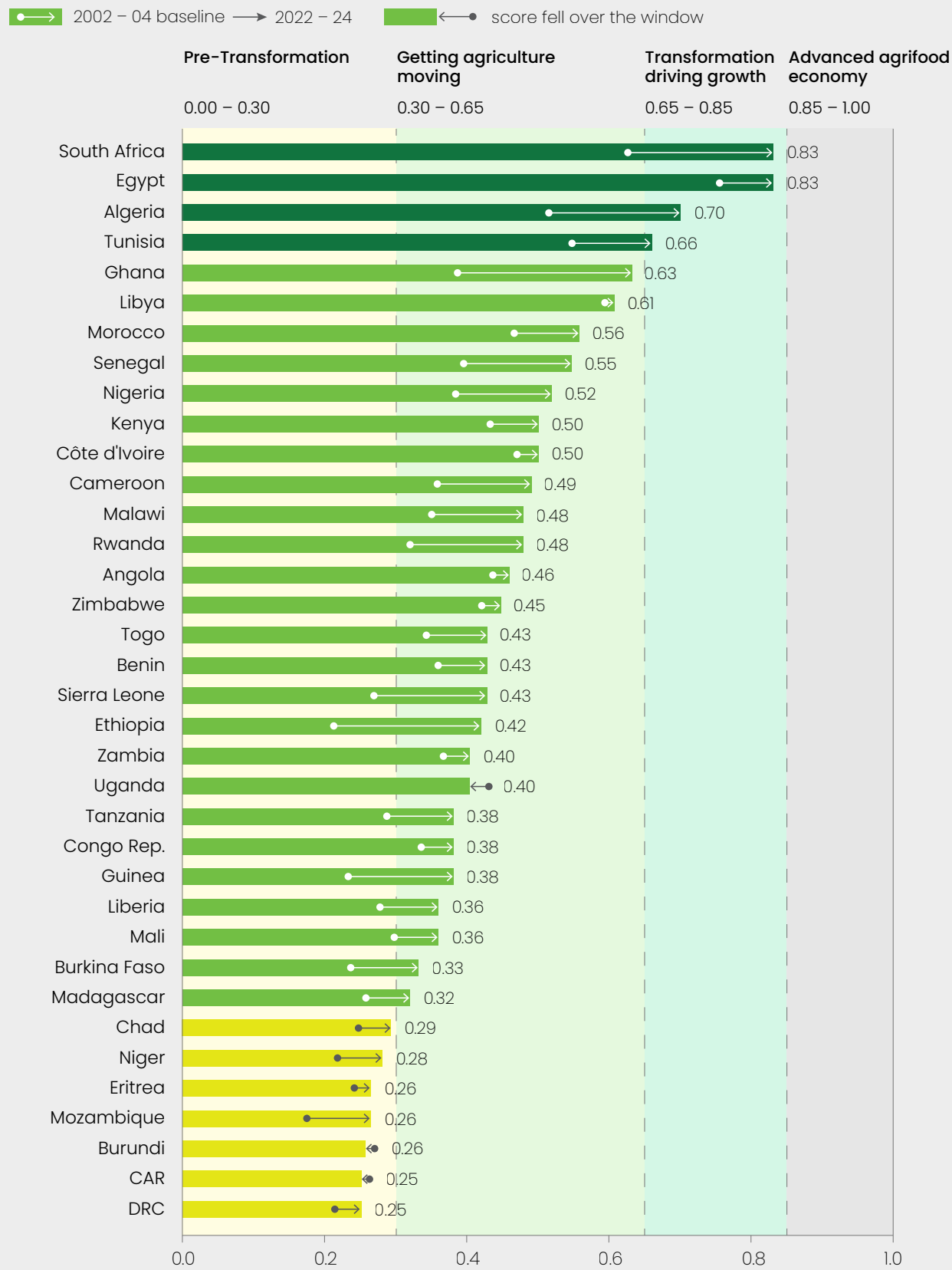
the main obstacle in any country, but it can indicate where to investigate first.

The index also shows how much progress countries have made over the past 20 years. Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda and Sierra Leone have recorded some of the largest gains. Even where they still lag their peers in absolute terms, their rate of progress suggests that the engines of transformation may be starting to ignite. Other countries can examine what would be needed to follow a similar trajectory.

Exhibit 16

Agrifood system sector progress across Africa

Directional assessment based on available data; For discussion purposes
Agrifood System Performance Score; (0 = no transformation, 1 = Frontier)



Source: AGRA@20 Transformation Index (rebuilt scorecard, 36 presented countries). Arrows show twenty-year change measured on the six indicators with a continuous 2002-04 to 2022-24 series – fertiliser, mechanisation, cereal yield, value added per worker, production value per hectare and non-agricultural employment. – reweighted to the composite scale; the dot marks the 2002-04 position. Uganda, Burundi and CAR lost ground over the window. Eritrea's arrow rests on five of the six indicators and is low-confidence. The top band is deliberately unpopulated: on this scale no presented country reaches 0.85. Scores within about 0.02 sit inside the model's resolution and should be read as bands rather than strict ranks; Chad (0.294) sits 0.006 below the 0.30 line, so its placement is provisional.

National scores conceal wide differences across crops and value chains. A globally competitive export sector can coexist with domestic staple markets that have changed little. Kenya, for example, earns more than USD 1 billion a year from smallholder horticulture exports, yet commercial seed use in its staple crops remains below 40%. The analysis in Exhibit 17 assesses six product categories across yields, yield growth and producer-price competitiveness. Tree and perennial export value chains perform best, reflecting decades of investment in buyers, standards, logistics and crop-specific institutions. Commercial cereals have generally advanced further in production and yields than indigenous cereals, but many remain less price-competitive than global peers in Brazil, India and Vietnam.

At the other end, indigenous cereals have attracted far less sustained research, commercial investment and market development, despite their importance to dryland farming, resilience and diets. Although both horticulture and animal-source foods have some of the largest potential for demand growth, both sets of value chains lag in terms of their potential at the continental level.

Across countries, Africa's value chains exhibit wide variation in competitiveness, performance, and performance trajectory. One implication is that transformation diagnoses and agendas should organise around value chains and food baskets.

Exhibit 17

Africa's value chains: Varied performance and competitiveness

High Low

Value chain	Yield gap to global	Yield growth 1984 – 2024	Price vs global	Competitive index*
Tree and perennial export (cocoa, coffee, cashew, tea)	-25%	+161%	0.74x	77
Roots, tubers and legumes (cassava, yams, cowpea, groundnut)	-62%	+41%	2.22x	51
Commercial cereals (maize, rice, wheat)	-44%	+81%	2.19x	50
Animal value chains (beef, chicken, goat)	-34%	+9%	-	45
Horticulture (tomato, onion)	-60%	+2%	1.66x	35
Indigenous cereals (sorghum, millet)	-72%	0%	1.87x	17

*Relative proxy of competitiveness based on yield gap, yield growth, and relative price (treating greater parity with global commodity prices as "more competitive").
Source: FAOSTAT: Yield Gap to Global (2022-24), Yield Growth (1984-2024), Producer Prices (2022-24), SSA 49-country aggregate; Baobab Impact Analysis.



“**Africa’s biodiversity is not a resource of the past; it is an asset for the future. We are already seeing the potential of rediscovery, with crops such as millet gaining renewed attention in Senegal. Today, science has matured enough for us to unlock the potential of many more neglected and underutilized species and bring them back to the heart of our food systems.**

— Dr Ismahane Elouafi, Executive Managing Director, CGIAR;
Champion of forgotten crops

Diagnosis: Why hasn’t Africa’s transformation engine ignited?

No single obstacle explains why progress has not produced agrifood transformation at scale, but three recur across countries and value chains. In many places, the foundations for farm productivity remain weak. Even where they exist, poor coordination across fragmented value chains discourages investment. These problems are reinforced by limited finance, political incentives that do not support long-term change and weak delivery capacity.

The foundations for farm-level productivity remain incomplete

Despite significant progress over the last twenty years, the conditions for profitable and resilient production are not fully in place, particularly in those countries that are further behind on the transformation curve.

Access to productive inputs remains limited and costly

This chapter has already shown how farmers’ access to improved inputs has expanded considerably over the last decades. Nevertheless, there is much to be done:

- Only 12 African countries were rated as having “good” seed systems in the Seed Sector Performance Index.⁶¹ Across much of the continent, breeding pipelines, quality assurance, variety availability and last-mile distribution still do not give farmers reliable access to locally adapted seed.
- Fertiliser markets have expanded, but access remains uneven and prices are high. Across ten countries, average retail urea prices in 2018 – 25 were

approximately ~50 to 130% above a comparable world-price benchmark, reflecting freight, port, distribution and market costs.⁶² The continent’s farmers remain particularly exposed to global shocks.

- Despite the emergence of new tech and AI-enabled advisory and extension services, the best comparable multi-country evidence found that fewer than one in four farmers had received agricultural extension during the preceding year.⁶³

Timely access to reliable seed, irrigation, mechanisation, crop protection and advice varies sharply. In countries where breeding pipelines, early-generation seed, regulation, quality assurance or last-mile distribution remain weak, investment is still required to build these basic foundations.

Exhibit 18

Where transformation stalls along the Build, Connect, Sustain pathway



Input access does not guarantee adoption

Exhibit 19 highlights two distinct challenges. In the lower half, many countries still need to build basic seed-system foundations: research, regulation, quality assurance, viable suppliers and last-mile delivery. In the upper-left, stronger foundations have not translated into widespread adoption. Nigeria, Tanzania and Kenya perform comparatively well on seed systems, yet commercial seed use for major crops remains below 40%.

No single factor explains lagging technology adoption: farmers may need finance, information, labour and land to invest profitably, while returns depend heavily on local soils, rainfall and infrastructure. Inputs

also work together; improved seed, for example, may reach its full potential only with the right fertiliser.⁶⁴ Yet farmers often lack access to several at once, with women facing even less access than men. In Ethiopia and Niger, only 13 to 14% of plots using fertiliser, improved seed or irrigation combined more than one of these technologies.⁶⁵ Packages that address several constraints can increase adoption and profits, but the right combination varies by crop, location and farmer.

Stronger input systems are therefore necessary but not enough. Adoption depends on the return from the full production package – and, ultimately, on whether markets reward the resulting surplus.

Productive infrastructure remains inadequate

Under-investment in basic public goods also undermines the viability of sector transformation.

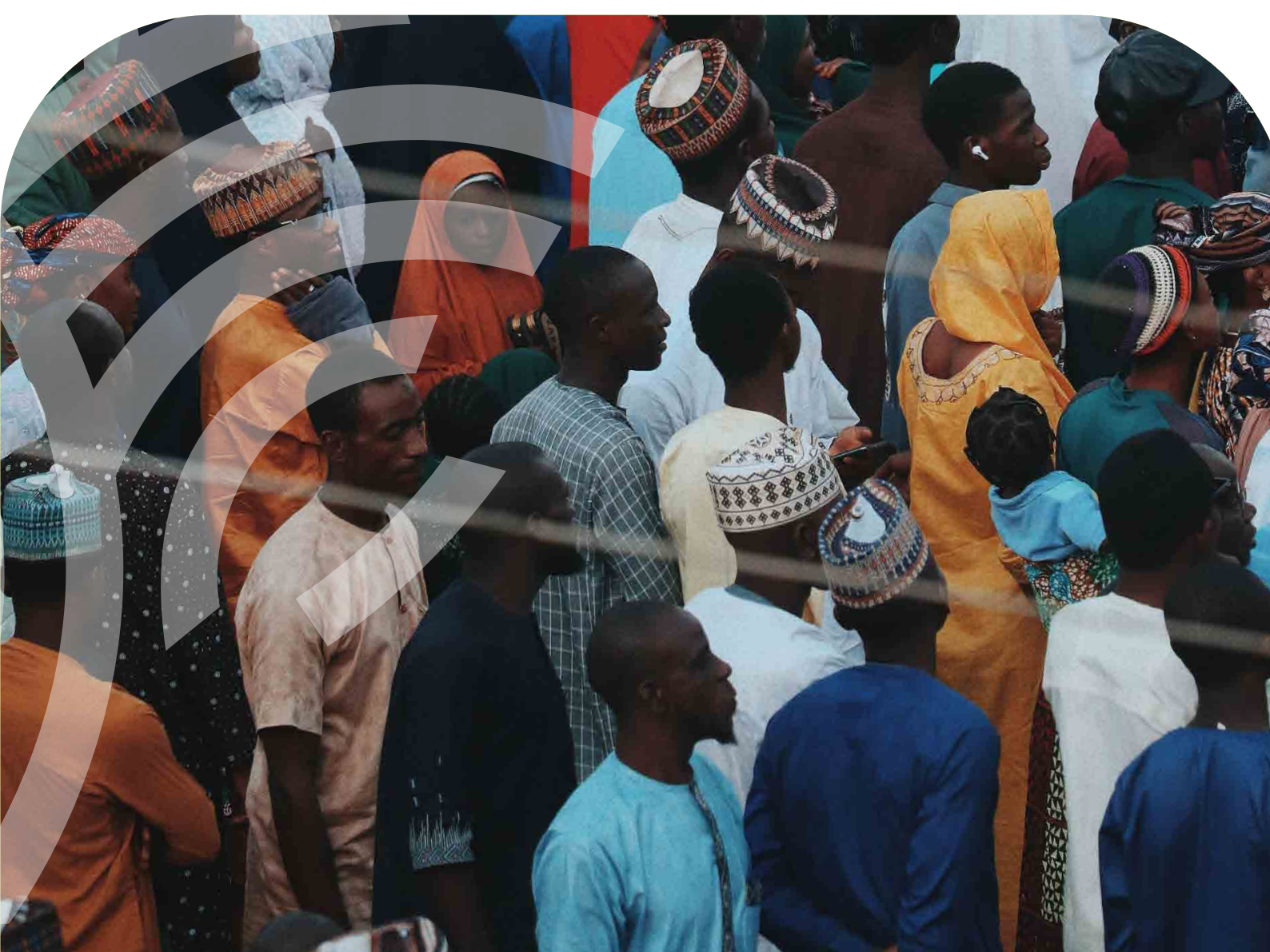
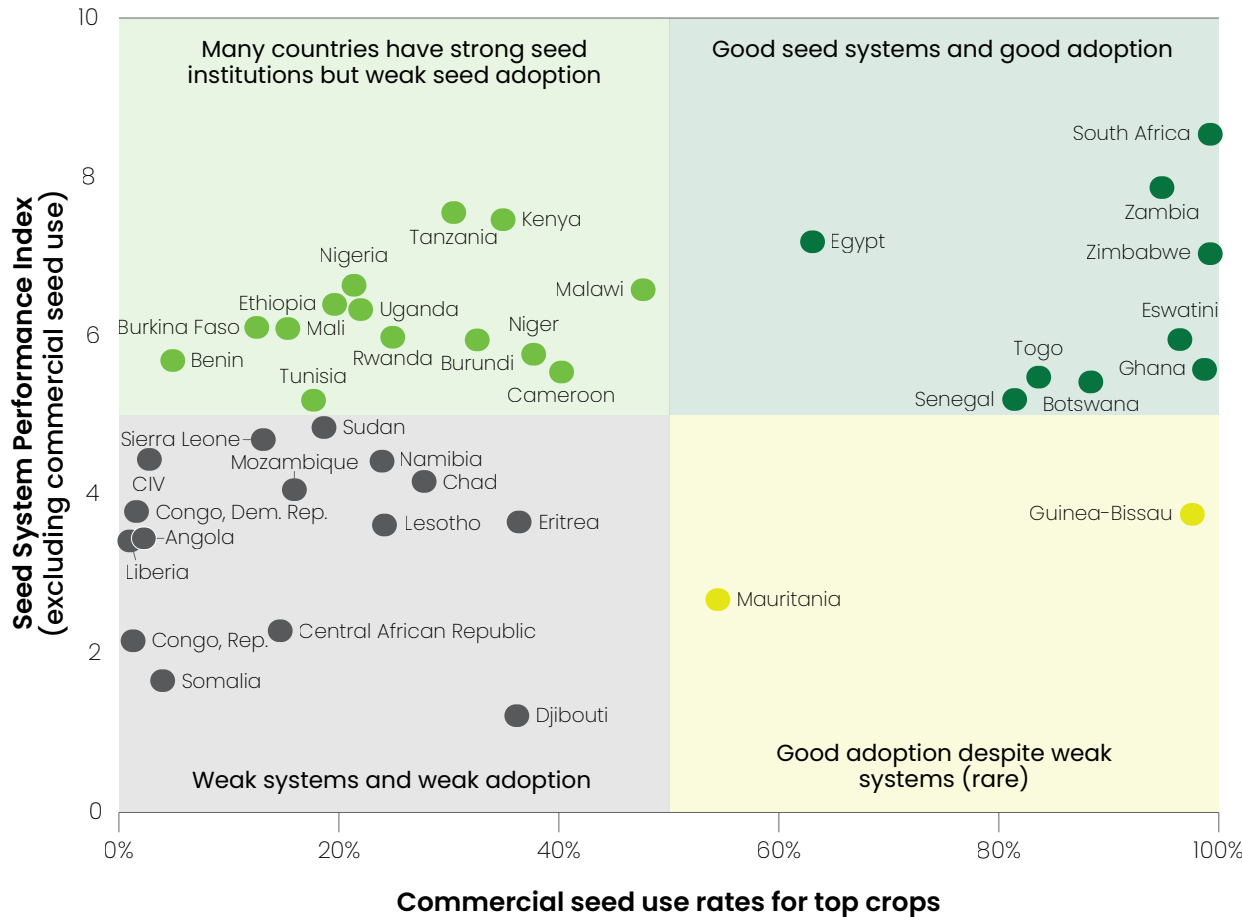
Only about 62% of Africa’s rural population lives within two kilometres of an all-season road, compared with 72% in Latin America and 89% in Asia.⁶⁶ Transport can add up to half of food prices in sub-Saharan Africa, especially for bulky staples. Unreliable electricity further constrains irrigation, storage, cooling and processing.⁶⁷

Irrigation – which played a starring role in Asia’s Green Revolutions – can be critical for farmers to maximise returns from investment on inputs and manage risk in climates with highly variable rainfall. Yet only about 3% of sub-Saharan cropland is equipped for irrigation.⁶⁸

“Where the roads, wholesale markets, electrification and water exist – what I call the ‘blood and bones’ – supply chains grow very quickly. Where the road has gone in, the place is growing; where it has not, it is dying.

— Professor Thomas Reardon, Michigan State University

Exhibit 19
Good seed systems are necessary but not sufficient for adoption of improved seed



Supply and demand are poorly connected

Africa’s food demand is large and growing, but fragmented supply chains prevent it from becoming a dependable market for many farmers and food businesses. Weak aggregation, inconsistent standards, limited working capital and unpredictable trade rules raise the cost and risk of sourcing locally. Processors therefore operate below capacity, farmers remain unsure of demand, and retailers often turn to imports. Costly and unreliable local sourcing and uncertain demand leave farmers and businesses with less reason to invest in farm productivity or value addition beyond the farm.

Value chain fragmentation impedes investment

Small farms and informal enterprises are the backbone of African food systems. Their size or informality is not itself the problem. The challenge is coordinating quality, volume, finance, storage and transport across millions of dispersed actors.

Three examples of coordination failures illustrate the costs of fragmentation:

- **Processing capacity without dependable supply.**

An AGRA survey across 15 countries found agro-processing plants operating at only 40 to 50% of capacity, reportedly because unreliable supply and expensive working capital left factories short of raw material. Nigeria’s Dangote tomato plant illustrates the risk: the 1,200-tonne-a-day facility has repeatedly operated far below capacity amid aggregation challenges and unresolved pricing with growers⁶⁹
- **Demand for quality without a functioning pricing system.**

Urban growth and export opportunities are increasing demand for higher-quality products. In Kenya, processors have lacked a practical way to reward farmers

for milk with lower bacteria or higher butterfat and protein.⁷⁰ A new quality-based pricing framework is emerging, but implementation will still require shared grading, farmer training, segregated collection, traceability and consistent standards.⁷¹

- **Interdependent investment across a chain.**

Zambia’s soybean-feed-poultry chain demonstrates the sequencing problem. Farmers need predictable prices and storage; crushers and feed mills need dependable volumes, power and working capital; and poultry producers need competitively priced feed. Each investment is dependent on the others.⁷²

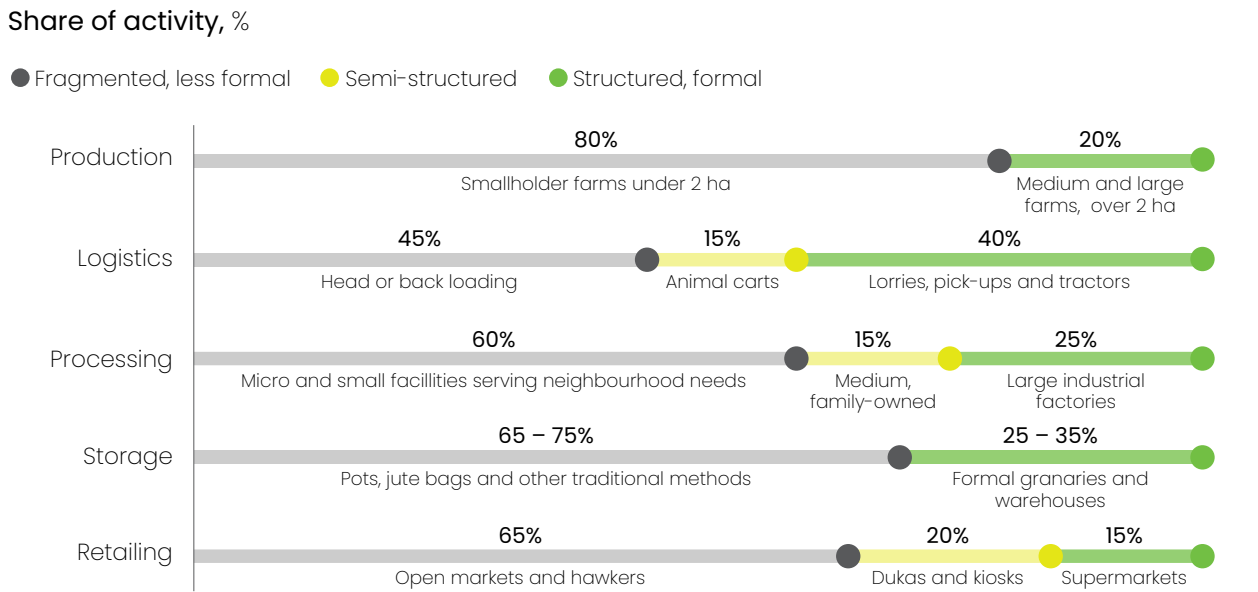
Market fragmentation cuts farmers off from demand

- Africa’s fragmented markets constrain investment because supply and demand often fail to connect. National markets are often too small or partly closed to absorb swings in production. A bumper grain harvest can cause prices to collapse unless neighbouring markets absorb the surplus; after drought or disease, prices rise just as sharply. Staple food prices in African markets are sometimes two to three times as volatile as world reference prices. Border delays, non-tariff barriers, export restrictions, shifting policies and inadequate storage keep surplus and deficit markets apart. Unpredictable returns discourage investment, making consistent marketable surpluses harder to achieve.

Larger integrated markets, such as India, can balance surpluses and shortages across regions. Although intra-African agrifood trade has grown, only about 17% of the continent’s agrifood imports are sourced from within Africa, compared with roughly 60% of food trade that stays within Asia or Europe.⁷³ Where producing more does not reliably pay, demand that could stimulate domestic production is instead met through imports.

Exhibit 20

At every stage of the food system, most activity sits with small, informal actors



Note: Figures for each stage are drawn from separate studies covering different countries and years, so the exhibit is illustrative of structure rather than a single consistent dataset. Source: Adapted from Boston Consulting Group (2023). Underlying sources: Climate Edge, How many smallholders are there in the world? (2022); Mercy Corps logistics case study (2021); 2ICF study; ScienceDirect, Traditional methods of food grain preservation in Nigeria vs India (2021); SciELO, post-harvest analysis in Uganda (2018); GeoPoll retail study, Kenya.

“Without a market to sell harvest, agriculture is doomed. A farmer invests in improved seed and harvests five tonnes, but his family can only eat two. If there’s no market, the other three tonnes just sit there and go to waste. So would that farmer invest again the next season? No. It’s only when there’s a market to sell into that farmers invest.

— Dr George Bigirwa, long-serving AGRA Seed Systems leader

**Missing enablers of transformation:
Finance, commitment, and delivery**

Transformation takes patient capital, political commitment, and institutions able to deliver on priorities. Across much of the continent, too little investment enters the sector; policy direction changes before firms and farmers can respond; and responsibility without clear ownership is spread across agencies.

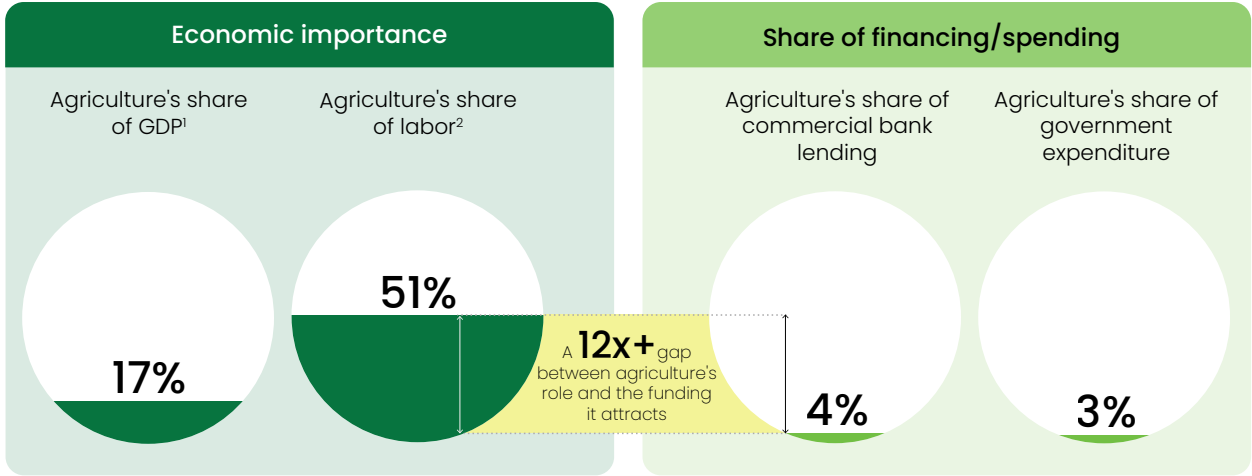
Too little investment flows into the sector

Agriculture accounts for about 17% of GDP and nearly half of employment, yet receives only around 4% of commercial bank lending (Exhibit 21). Capital investment is also low: roughly 9% of agricultural GDP is reinvested in the sector, compared with about 15% in benchmark Asian economies (Exhibit 22). In 2025, the African Development Bank estimated an annual financing gap of USD 180 billion for farmers and agricultural enterprises.⁷⁴

Exhibit 21

Financing in the agrifood sector

Agriculture-sector financing and spending relative to the sector's importance in the economy



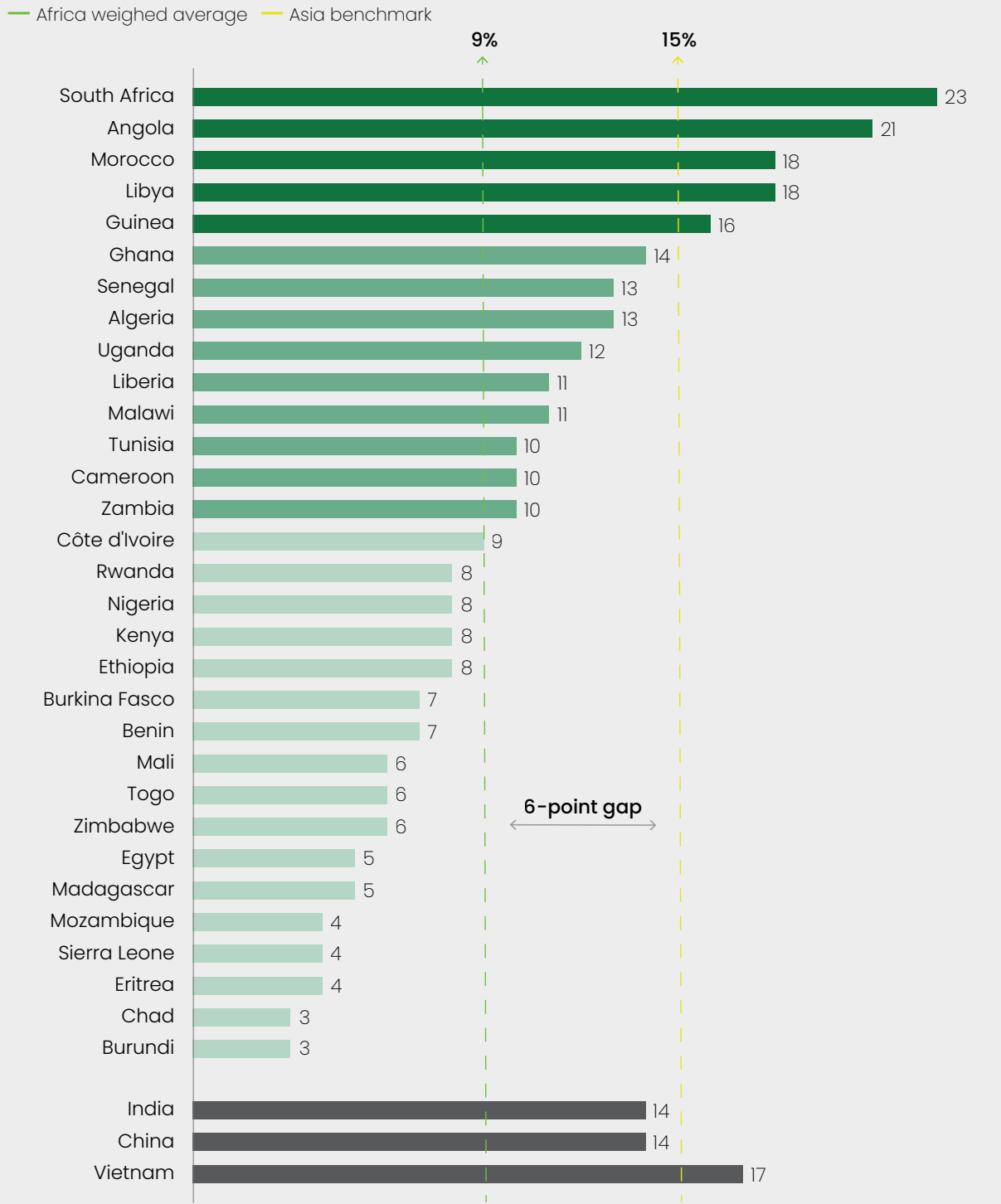
¹Excluding off-farm.
²Primary employment in agriculture (ILO modelled estimate); reflects primary occupation, not full-time-equivalent labour.
Source: World Bank, IFPRI, Aceli/Dalberg, team analysis.



Exhibit 22

Agriculture Investment Ratio (AIR): Agricultural capital investment as a share of agriculture value added, 2022

Sub-Saharan Africa (31 countries) vs comparators; dashed line = weighted average (9.3%)



Source: AIR = agricultural capital investment as a share of agricultural value added. A higher ratio means more is reinvested in the sector.

The economics of serving agricultural SMEs have historically been a barrier for commercial lenders. These businesses are located in remote areas, have few assets to offer as collateral, and have limited capacity to navigate volatile markets and extreme weather. Only by shifting the risk-returns of agri-SME lending will capital flow to the sector at the scale required.

— **Brian Milder**, Founder and CEO, Aceli Africa; Agri-SME finance specialist

For banks, high risk and service costs make smaller agricultural loans unattractive. In a five-country benchmark of 32,000 agri-SME loans worth about USD 2 billion, loans below USD 25,000 lost 2.2% on average, loans of USD 25,000 – USD 50,000 returned 1.6%, and loans above USD 50,000 returned 8.4%. In contrast, government bonds yielded about 16% with far less risk.⁷⁵

Farmers also invest cautiously because three major risks remain largely uninsured. Rain-fed production exposes them to droughts and floods; pests and disease can destroy crops without warning; and volatile commodity prices make returns uncertain even after a good harvest. Under these conditions, caution is rational.

Evidence from northern Ghana supports this. Farmers offered rainfall insurance invested more, cultivated more land and bought more inputs than those given cash grants alone. The comparison showed that rainfall insurance produced a stronger investment response than cash grants alone, suggesting that uninsured downside risk, not simply lack of cash, was the real issue.⁷⁶

Today, climate change increases drought and flood risk, particularly in rain-fed, single-season systems.⁷⁷ But insurance, price stabilisation and household safety nets remain limited. Until more of this risk is shared, farmers and value chains will continue to attract less investment than their potential returns justify.

In the face of high, uninsured risk, governments have a critical role to play. In addition to funding traditional public goods (R&D, roads, etc.), public and development finance can absorb risks that private lenders cannot bear alone, through insurance, guarantees and first-loss capital.

Political commitment to transformation is unstable

For more than two decades, CAADP has provided an architecture for government commitments, plans and peer review. Forty-five countries have signed compacts and 31 have developed national investment plans. But financing and delivery have lagged. Agriculture's share of public spending fell from 3.6% in 2003 – 08 to 2.8% in 2014 – 23, and no country was on track to meet all Malabo commitments at the fourth Biennial Review, published in 2023.⁷⁸

Food politics makes long-term agricultural policy difficult. Governments face immediate pressure to keep food affordable, deliver visible benefits within electoral cycles and support politically important groups. Those incentives often favour export restrictions, price controls and broad input subsidies over less visible investment in research, irrigation, extension and market infrastructure.

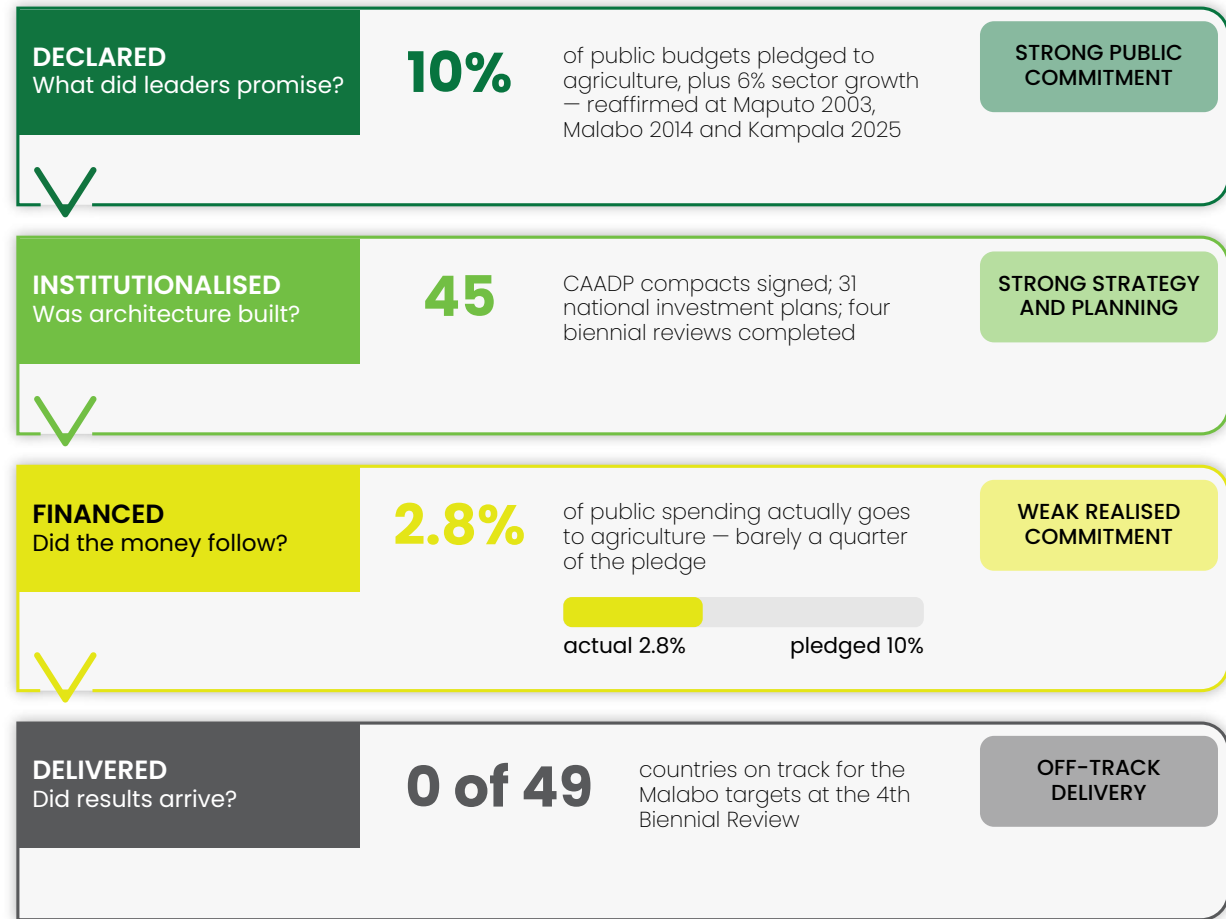
Zambia's maize export bans are estimated to have cost producers and supply-chain actors about USD 1.4 billion between 2008 and 2016, while Malawi's farm input subsidy programme has at times absorbed 40 – 70% of the agriculture budget.⁷⁹ The problem is not a lack of sector strategy or ambition. Rather, the priorities and rules often change before farmers and firms can invest with confidence.

We need to walk the talk on policy. There are so many policy documents being produced by institutions across the continent, but they are not always implemented fast enough...Everybody is celebrating victory. Yet people are poorer and poorer. One out of five Africans is hungry. We are not winning the war.

— **Fadel Ndiame**, Executive Director, Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR)



Public commitments fail to translate into delivered results



Ultimately, political support for long-term transformation remains weak. Smallholders are dispersed, consumers facing high food prices exert immediate pressure, and agribusiness is unevenly organised. At the same time, there may be increasing opportunity. Domestic industrial capital is moving into fertiliser, milling, poultry, sugar and processing which can drive support for production and value addition. But capital will not stay in production if imports, trading, or treasury bills offer safer returns.

Decision-making and delivery is fragmented

Agricultural outcomes depend on decisions across agriculture, trade, infrastructure, finance, land and local government. Responsibility is often divided among agencies that coordinate poorly, with several knock-on effects. Budgets arrive late or are underspent,

research and extension are overstretched, and monitoring often records activities rather than results. In Kenya, about 20 public agencies share responsibility for agricultural finance, but no institution owns the overall agenda.⁶⁰

Project funding can also compound fragmentation when programmes create parallel priorities and reporting cycles, or delivery arrangements that disappear when funding ends.

The breakthrough cases described earlier show the value of continuity. Where a capable public or private anchor held direction, resolved bottlenecks, and sustained delivery over time, farmers and firms could respond. Good strategies matter, but they need delivery systems that survive the time horizons of individual projects and leadership changes.

“It is not the policies, it is the policy somersaults. Allow rice imports, then do not; allow wheat imports, then do not. People pour money in and then lose it. Investors need policy stability before capital will flow.”

— Ada Osakwe, Founder & Managing Partner, Agrolay Ventures; Founder & CEO, Nuli; AGRA Board Director

Conclusion

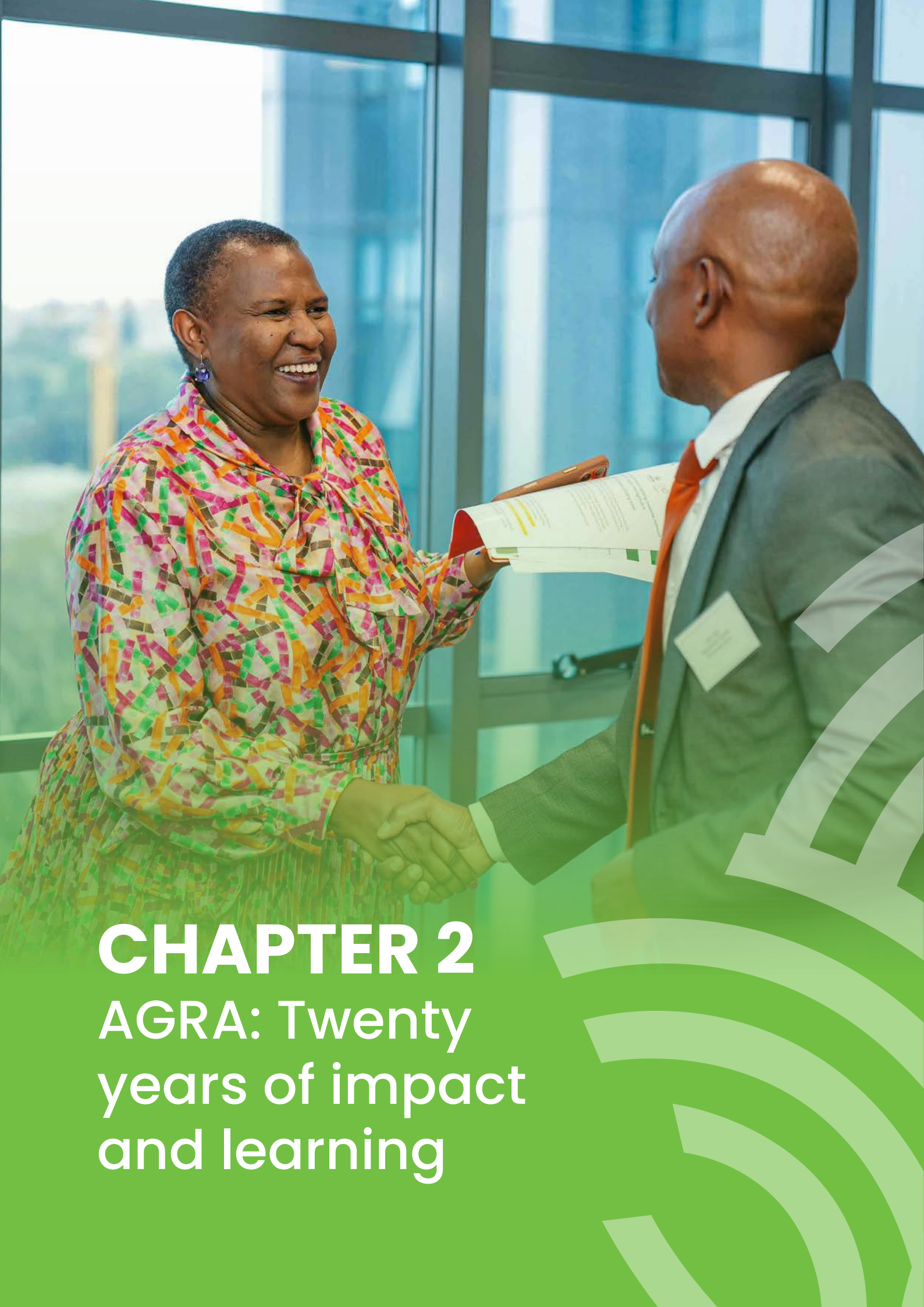
Over the past twenty years, African countries and institutions have rebuilt important foundations of the continent’s agrifood system, and breakthrough value chains show that transformation is possible. But these stronger drivers have not consistently produced step changes in productivity, farmer incomes, off-farm value addition or food-system resilience.

The solutions vary. Some countries still need basic research, input, advisory and infrastructure systems. Elsewhere, the task is to connect production to reliable demand

and coordinate investment across the value chain. Across both, finance, stable policy and capable delivery institutions must remain in place long enough for gains to compound – all without degrading the soils, water and biodiversity on which future production depends.

AGRA’s own 20-year experience provides deeper insight on what it takes to unlock durable transformation. The next chapter turns to this experience.





CHAPTER 2

AGRA: Twenty years of impact and learning

Two decades of working with partners to build, integrate and deepen agricultural systems.

KEY MESSAGES

- 1. AGRA was created to help rebuild weak agricultural foundations.**

In 2006, most African countries had limited seed and input systems, soil-health support, agricultural finance, markets and institutional capacity. AGRA's role was catalytic from the outset: working through governments and alongside researchers, businesses, farmers and funders to help build lasting systems with reach far beyond its own programmes.
- 2. AGRA evolved as experience revealed what transformation required.**

Its first decade helped build essential foundations and its second brought them together through country-led programmes. Now the goal widens to include incomes, jobs, nutrition and resilience. Over time, it placed greater emphasis on women and young people, climate adaptation and protecting the natural resources on which future production depends.
- 3. AGRA helped build foundations that have lasted.**

Local seed industries emerged, improved inputs moved closer to farmers, African scientists were trained and policy and regulatory institutions became stronger. New platforms also connected governments, farmers and businesses to knowledge, markets and investment.
- 4. Results were strongest where support for production, finance, markets and policy came together, but varied widely across countries and programmes.**

Better seed, soil health and farmer advisory services produced stronger results when accompanied by finance and reliable markets. However climate, market and policy shocks exposed how easily gains could be weakened where local institutions and businesses were unable to sustain them. Reaching women and young people also did not always lead to equal economic benefits or meaningful work.
- 5. Higher production did not consistently lead to higher incomes, stronger businesses and better jobs.**

AGRA was stronger at improving production than at turning those gains into lasting incomes, viable businesses, good jobs, better nutrition and resilience. Closing that gap is the central task emerging from its first twenty years.



“Let us all do our part to help Africa’s farmers and their families take their first steps out of chronic poverty, and to help societies make a decisive move towards balanced and sustainable

development. Let us generate a uniquely African green revolution – a revolution that is long overdue, a revolution that will help the continent in its quest for dignity and peace.”

— **Kofi Annan**, opening remarks, Africa’s Green Revolution: A Call to Action, Addis Ababa, 5 July 2004

AGRA was founded in 2006 to help rebuild Africa’s agricultural systems, giving institutional expression to Annan’s call for a uniquely African Green Revolution. This chapter traces what AGRA has built over 20 years, what has lasted and what its experience reveals.



The scientific panel behind AGRA’s founding

AGRA’s founding drew on an independent scientific assessment commissioned for Annan on how to raise agricultural productivity and food security in Africa. The InterAcademy Panel brought together senior agricultural scientists from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Pictured here with Meles Zenawi, others.

Co-chairs: Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe (Uganda), Rudy Rabbinge (Netherlands), M.S. Swaminathan (India)

Members: Mohamed Besri, Maria Manuela Chaves, Avílio Antonio Franco, Jikun Huang, Ryuichi Ishii, Renald Lafond, Peter Matlon, Ahmadou Lamine Ndiaye, Bongwiwe Njobe, Emmanuel Uche Odigboh, Gideon Oron, Per Pinstrup-Andersen, Elly N. Sabiti, José Sarukhán, Jennifer Thomson, Louise Fresco

Directorate: Jim Ryan, Prem Bindraban, Huub Löffler



AGRA Board, Nairobi, Kenya, 2009

Seated left to right: Strive Masiyiwa, Judith Rodin, Kofi A Annan, Sylvia M Mathews, Mohamed Ibrahim, Moise C Mensah. Standing left to right: Monty Jones, Rudy Rabbinge, Roy Steiner

AGRA's evolution

A note on approach and attribution

As noted in the introduction, this report is a reflection on AGRA's first 20 years, not a technical evaluation. It draws on independent evaluations, outcome assessments, AGRA strategies and monitoring data, published research and interviews with current and former staff, government officials, funders, implementation partners, businesses, external experts and farmers. We used documented evidence wherever it was available. Factual claims drawn from interviews were included where they could be confirmed by the relevant people or organisations.

The evidence is strongest for AGRA's second decade, where independent evaluation is most complete. Evidence for AGRA 3.0 (spanning the period 2023 to 2028) is still emerging because the strategy is only halfway through. Each period is assessed against the objectives and measures set out in the strategy relevant to that time span. If we are able to compare our aims with our achievements, we have done that. Otherwise, we present the strongest evidence available without forcing a comparison. AGRA's ambitions sometimes combined wider outcomes it sought to influence with

programme results for which it was more directly accountable. AGRA did not always communicate that distinction clearly, contributing to different interpretations of its commitments.

The three periods used in this chapter represent an analytical frame rather than neatly defined time spans. Strategies, programmes and funding commitments often extended across these time boundaries, so work reported in one period may have been conceived, funded or begun in another. The sequence is intended to show how AGRA's approach evolved over time.

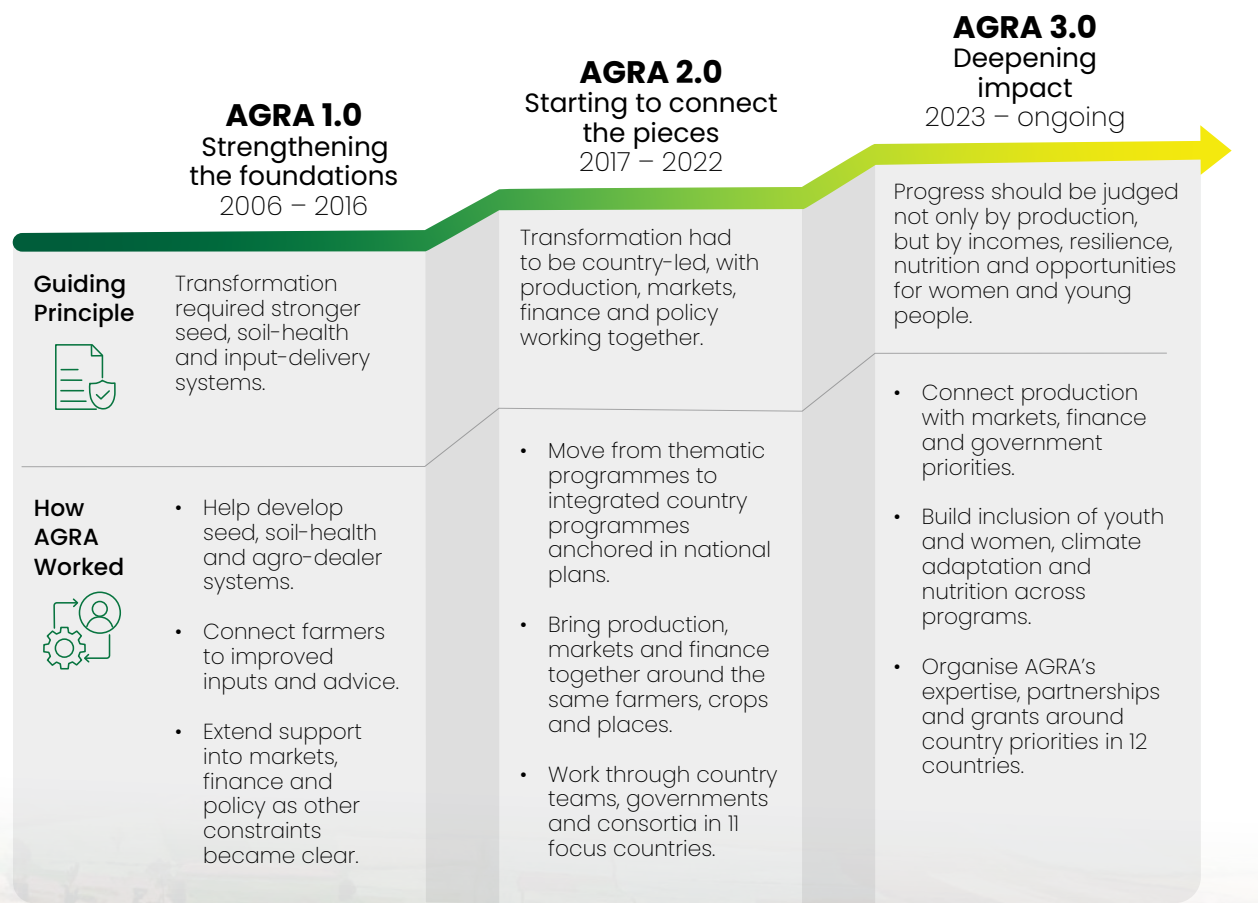
AGRA also rarely acted alone. It supported government-led efforts, joined initiatives led by others or worked through partnerships with businesses, researchers, funders and farmer organisations. The chapter therefore describes AGRA's contribution to wider results rather than attributing them to AGRA alone. Reported impacts also often apply to particular programmes, locations or groups of participating farmers, not entire countries. We have stated the scope of the results wherever the evidence allows.

AGRA began in 2006 with a bold proposition: Africa urgently needed to transform its agriculture through a uniquely African Green Revolution suited to its farmers, landscapes, markets and consumers. It could draw on the achievements of earlier Green Revolutions while learning from their shortcomings. Annan's call gave that ambition urgency, and

AGRA was created to help African institutions and partners put it into practice. Two decades later, its experience shows what sustained investment can achieve and why progress does not always spread or last. This chapter traces AGRA's catalytic role across three periods, how its approach evolved and what that experience means for its future.

Exhibit 24

Three eras, one purpose: improving smallholder livelihoods through agrifood transformation



AGRA 1.0

Strengthening the foundations, 2006 – 2016

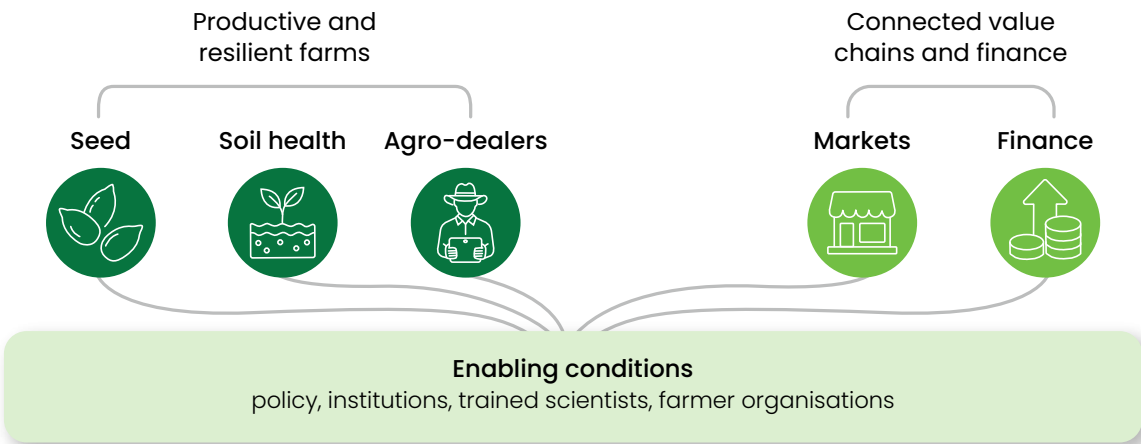
In 2006, AGRA was founded on the premise that an African Green Revolution had not taken hold because many of the institutions and delivery systems needed to sustain it were weak or absent. Its first decade focused on establishing these foundations, beginning with seed and soil health and expanding into input delivery, extension, markets, finance and policy. The model was mainly supply-side driven: it assumed that farmers would respond when better inputs and advice became available, and that markets would absorb what they produced.

AGRA began its activities amid the global 2007 – 08 food-price crisis, which put agriculture and food security back on the agenda for many African governments and donors. The crisis also renewed the focus on Africa’s 2003 CAADP commitments and strengthened the case for AGRA’s mission.

AGRA’s work was organised around five connected areas, starting with seeds.

Exhibit 25

The building blocks of AGRA’s first decade

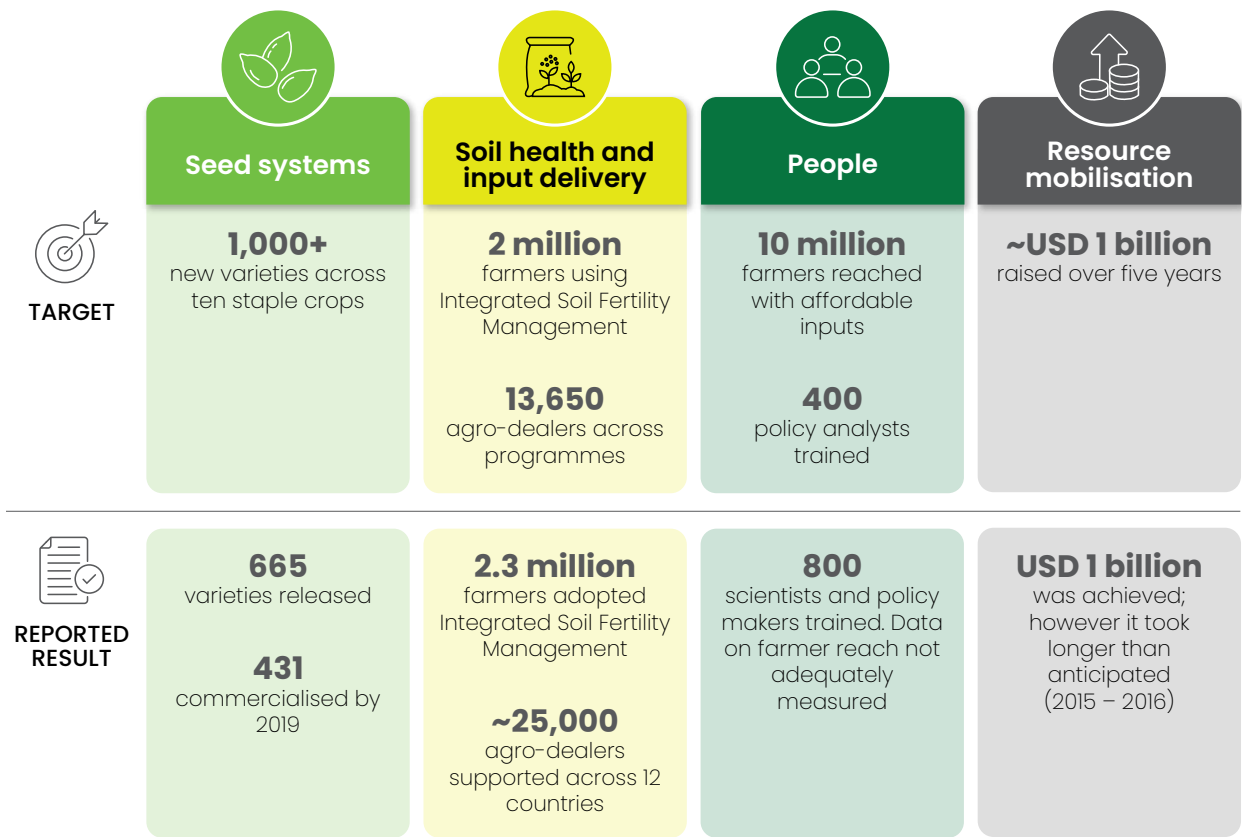


AGRA 1.0: Building the foundations

The aim was to build the seed, soil and market infrastructure, as well as the delivery and policy foundations needed to raise agricultural productivity.

Headline ambition

Contribute towards CAADP target of doubling staple-food crop productivity, production and income for 20 million smallholder farm households by 2020. *Targets were set by different programmes and did not all cover the same period or geography.*



Productive and resilient farms

Seed systems

In 2006, the seed varieties most African farmers planted were 20 to 30 years old, and over 80% used seed saved from the previous harvest.⁸¹ There were fewer than 500 hundred active plant breeders in sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa.⁸² AGRA's Programme for Africa's Seed Systems (PASS) aimed both to get improved varieties into farmers' hands and to build a commercial seed sector that would outlast AGRA's support. It trained plant breeders, funded breeding across more than 10 staple crops, capitalised

local seed companies and built distribution networks. By the end of the programme in 2017, 655 varieties had been released.⁸³ In this period, AGRA-supported seed companies were producing about 140,000 tonnes of certified seed⁸⁴ a year, up from near zero at programme start – enough to plant an estimated 4 to 6 million hectares per year.⁸⁵ That early investment contributed to the seed industry that exists today: 118 seed companies across AGRA's focus countries received direct support during their development.

When I look back on the journey we have walked as a company, words fail me. I started as an employee of another seed company, then decided to go my own way in 2005 as an agro-dealer, selling seed of other companies in one small rented room. Then with the coming of AGRA, I had the guts to venture into a full-fledged seed company and go from 12.7 MT to eventually over 9,000 MT today, and grow from a one-man company to over 250 permanent staff and 500 casual labourers, and from one room to a headquarters, four branches and warehouses across the country. To me this is a miracle!

— Chacha Goryo, Founder and CEO, Meru Agro, Tanzania

STORY

A veterinarian who helped Rwanda grow its own seed

In 2006, Rwanda had no private seed companies and most farmers planted saved grain. AGRA helped train a new generation of Rwandan scientists, invested in improved varieties, and supported the first local seed companies. One, Ignite Seed Company, was founded in 2014 by Norah Kamashazi, a veterinarian and one of only two women to own a seed company in the country.

By 2020, the country had 20 seed companies, including 15 established with direct AGRA support. Reliance on imported seed fell from 95% to 54% between 2018 and 2020, and by 2024 the country was meeting domestic demand and exporting surplus seed.

We started with seed because without improved seed in the hands of farmers, nothing else in the food system moves.

— Joseph DeVries, Founder, Seed Systems Group; former AGRA Seeds Programme Director

Soil health

By the late 2000s, 85% of African countries were losing more than 30kg of soil nutrients per hectare each year, while fertiliser use averaged just 8kg per hectare versus more than 100kg in India.⁸⁶ The problem was not only low use: farmers were often given advice that ignored differences in their soils, and in parts of East and Central Africa acidic soils needed lime before fertiliser would work.⁸⁷ AGRA's Soil Health Programme, launched in 2008 in 13 countries, promoted Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM), combining organic and inorganic nutrients with practices suited to local soils. It also funded soil mapping and crop-specific recommendations that shaped national blending programmes.

Around 2.3 million farmers adopted these practices, raising cereal yields by roughly 60% and producing an estimated 2.8 million tonnes of additional cereals and 1 million tonnes of legumes, worth about USD 445 million.⁸⁸

Because fertiliser was often too expensive, hard to finance and poorly distributed, AGRA also helped establish the Africa Fertiliser and

Agribusiness Partnership (AFAP) with a USD 25 million grant to de-risk private suppliers.⁸⁹ In later years, AGRA also became a donor and supported the African Development Bank-led Africa Fertiliser Financing Mechanism, which unlocked credit.⁹⁰ Getting fertiliser to farmers was as much a finance and market problem as a soil one.

Agro-dealers

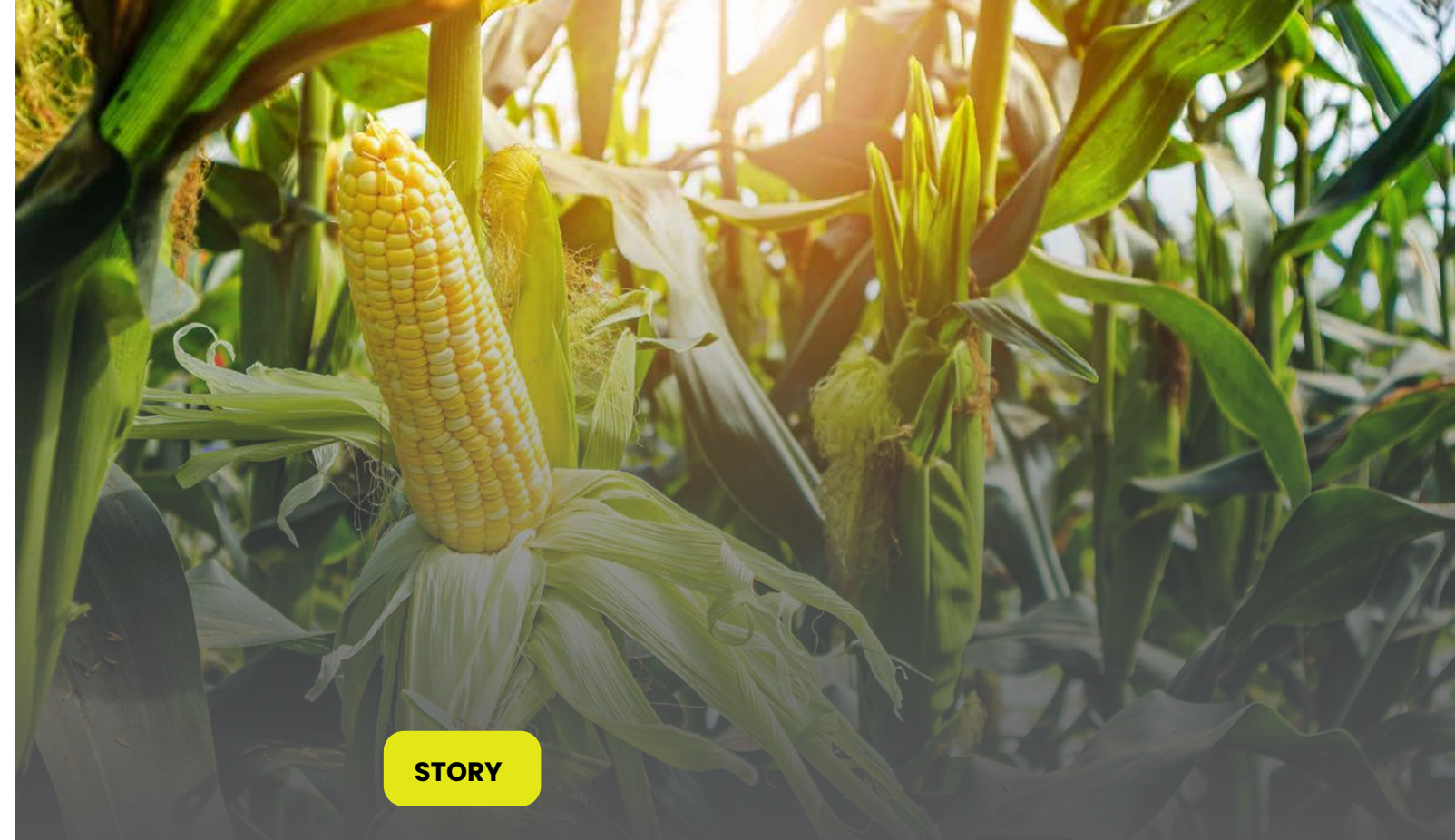
In 2006, the typical smallholder lived more than 50km from any reliable source of certified seed or quality fertiliser, and the retailers that existed had little training, stock or working capital. Many farmers recycled seed because a supply chain for improved inputs did not exist. AGRA trained and certified about 25,000⁹¹ agro-dealers across 12 countries, giving them start-up capital and business training, linking them to seed companies and fertiliser distributors and building the quality-control systems that enabled farmers to trust what they bought. The average distance a farmer travelled for quality inputs fell from more than 50 km to about 10 km or less⁹², and among AGRA-supported farmers, adoption reached 75% for fertiliser and 48% for improved seed.⁹³



There are three things that have to come together to raise productivity, and I call it one third, one third, one third. One third is improving the soil, which in many areas was degraded, through an integrated approach that combines organic and inorganic fertilisers. The second is using good seed, and the third, which is often forgotten, is good agronomic practices.

— Dr Bashir Jama, former Soil Health Programme Director, AGRA

The late Dr. Bashir Jama shared these reflections during the preparation of this review, shortly before his passing. We honour his distinguished contribution to Africa's agricultural transformation and the enduring impact of his leadership, knowledge and service.



STORY

A farmer who turned better soil into a bigger life

In northern Tanzania, depleted soils had long capped what Rose Fratern's land could return. Working through the Selian Agricultural Research Institute, she took up integrated soil fertility management, matching inputs to what her soil actually needed rather than applying fertiliser blindly. Her maize yield nearly doubled. In a single season she brought in 120 bags of maize and 45 of soybean, earning about USD 6,500, several times her previous income.

The income gave her room to plan. She bought three mass-transit three-wheelers that she now runs as a transport business, giving her a wider financial base. "I have more income, and I can even withstand production shortfalls due to droughts," she said.



From the proceeds of my sales, I have bought three mass-transit three-wheelers.

— Rose Fratern

Connected value chains and finance

Output markets

The Market Access Programme (MAP) was among AGRA's largest efforts to connect farmers to buyers, establishing aggregation centres, warehouse systems, structured trading, out-grower schemes and exchange links. Between 2009 and 2013, it trained more than 730,000 farmers and built over 600 aggregation centres.⁹⁴ AGRA-supported farmers sold more than 615,000 tonnes through structured trades worth about USD 220 million, while post-harvest losses among participants fell from 19% to 9%.⁹⁵ An independent evaluation found, however, that many smallholders could not use Warehouse Receipt Systems. The model depended on accessible warehouses, affordable finance, favourable markets and enough produce to aggregate. Its usual minimum of 10 tonnes favoured larger farmers; in Kenya, participants cultivated plots about 30% larger than non-participants. Other farmers stayed out because they distrusted the system or faced uncertain offtake prices and financing costs. Sudden policy shifts could also undo progress: after Kenya imposed a 50% excise duty on sorghum beer, one buyer cancelled its farmer contracts.⁹⁶

Finance

Finance remains one of the most challenging constraints in the African agrifood sector. For farmers, it means being unable to buy seed and fertiliser at the start of a season; for agro-dealers, it means lacking the working capital to hold stock; and for seed companies and processors, it means having no access to the credit they need to expand. At the start of AGRA's work, commercial banks directed less than 3% of lending to the continent's largest source of livelihoods. The financing shortfall remains enormous, at an estimated USD 180 billion a year.¹⁰⁰ More than a third of this gap, about USD 65 billion, reflects the unmet financing needs of small and medium agribusinesses seeking loans of USD 25,000 to USD 1.5 million.¹⁰¹ These amounts are too large for microfinance, while commercial banks often consider the loans too small or the borrowers too risky to lend to.

150,000+
smallholder
farmers reached
through expanded
agricultural finance.

AGRA worked with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Government of Kenya through the Programme for Rural Outreach of Financial Innovations and Technologies (PROFIT) to reduce lenders' risk and build a pipeline of viable borrowers. A USD 6.9 million guarantee, combined with technical support, unlocked USD 32.2 million in financing for more than 1,000 cooperatives, anchor agribusinesses and other direct borrowers, which in turn reached over 150,000 smallholder farmers. At one participating bank, the share of its agricultural loan portfolio at risk fell from 50% in 2017 to 9% in 2019, and no claims were made against the guarantee.¹⁰² AGRA also supported similar risk-sharing approaches through NIRSAL in Nigeria and GIRSAL in Ghana.^{103, 104}

The Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund (AECF), launched as an AGRA initiative in 2008, was designed to close the gap for enterprises that were too small for commercial credit. Using competitive grants and repayable capital, AECF helped firms reach the point where private finance could take over.

One cautionary case proved less successful: the African Seed Investment Fund and West African Agriculture Investment Fund, launched in 2009 as AGRA's attempt to act as a fund manager rather than a risk-sharing partner, recorded a negative return with only two of 23 investments succeeding. AGRA carried the lessons into later programming.¹⁰⁵



STORY

From informal trade to organised markets

Uganda is one of East Africa's two main grain-surplus countries, serving markets in Kenya, Rwanda and Burundi.⁹⁷ However, for years, much of this trade has been informal and run on distress sales. The Grain Council of Uganda, working with AGRA and Stanbic Bank, helped farmers and cooperatives meet quality standards and access the needed financing. One Kapchorwa cooperative saw its maize price more than triple, from UGX400 – UGX500 to UGX1,600 per kilo when it met standards.⁹⁸

AGRA has helped small and medium-sized agribusinesses generate more than USD 21 million in regional grain trade over three years, through more than 440 aggregation centres, drawing hundreds of thousands of farmers into structured markets.

“**We (now) test moisture, store correctly, and buyers trust our quality.**⁹⁹

— **Fred Chesombe**, Member, Pchesombe Green Change Farmers' Cooperative
Kapchorwa District



Capitalizing the Unseen:

Catalyzing Private Investment at the Frontier

The Frontier Mandate

Emerging as a special initiative of AGRA in 2008, AECF stands at the forefront of Africa's economic transformation, bridging the critical funding gap for early-stage agribusinesses and renewable energy ventures. Operating strictly in frontier markets and fragile contexts, we deploy risk-tolerant capital to commercialize game-changing business models. By transforming low-income households from passive recipients into active market participants, AECF creates sustainable pathways out of poverty for women, youth, and rural communities across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Origin & Strategic Lineage

2005

Commission for Africa: Born from a landmark recommendation to establish an African-led challenge fund capable of unlocking private sector innovation.

2008

World Economic Forum Launch: Officially unveiled as a special initiative of AGRA with USD 35M in catalytic backing from the UK and Dutch governments.

2026 – 2030

Horizon: Evolving from a pure challenge fund into a dynamic multi-instrument finance platform, introducing structured guarantees and concessional debt to propel enterprises to continental scale.

"Where mainstream finance sees insurmountable risk, AECF sees commercial viability, human potential, and the future of African resilience."

AECF's Impact Engine

Cumulative Performance through December 2025

37M+

Human Lives Reached

USD 290M+

Catalytic Capital Deployed

700

High-Growth Enterprises Backed

27

Sub-Saharan Markets Covered

USD 2

Billion

Net Development Impact Generated

USD 942

Million

Private Sector Capital Mobilized

3.5x

Capital Leveraged for Every Dollar Deployed

AECF Core (USD 100K – USD 1.5M):

Catalyzes early-stage, high-risk innovations via flexible grants and results-based financing.

AECF Capital (USD 500K – USD 4M):

Scales growth-stage enterprises through concessional debt, direct advisory, and targeted technical assistance.

Portfolio Spotlights



Investing in Women (USD 35M Flagship):

Driving economic empowerment across Kenya, South Sudan, Nigeria, Benin, and Burkina Faso. Impacted 136,723 lives while achieving a 9.79x private-sector capital leverage ratio.



REACT SSA (Clean Energy Platform):

Deployed USD 37.3M in grants to mobilize USD 111.15M in total funding (USD 36.15M direct mobilization + USD 75M matching funds). Backed 79 clean energy ventures across 8 nations, bringing 16MW of installed capacity to 643,604 households while avoiding 640,913 tCO₂e.



Kakuma Kalobeyei (Fragile Contexts):

Sustained 2,277 direct and 8,281 indirect jobs (10,558 total) across 129 local enterprises, building economic self-reliance for 50,687 refugee and host-community households in Kenya.



Seed for Impact (Agribusiness Focus):

Supported local seed producers across Sub-Saharan Africa to improve commercial reach. In Tanzania alone, enabled 6,280 smallholders to access certified seeds, directly impacting 31,400 lives.

As we chart the path forward into our 2026 – 2030 strategy, AECF continues to redefine development finance—ensuring the future of African enterprise and agricultural resilience remains firmly in our hands.

In partnership with



When Farmers Prosper, Africa Prospers.

Enabling conditions: policy environment, scientific capability and farmer organisations

Seed, soil, markets and finance could not deliver lasting change on their own. AGRA also invested in the conditions that enabled them work.

Policy environment

From 2010 to 2015, AGRA's Policy Action Nodes and Hubs brought researchers, businesses, farmer organisations, parliamentarians, regulators and ministries together to resolve specific constraints in seed, soil health, markets and land rights.¹⁰⁶ The work contributed to Ghana's Plants and Fertiliser Act, which gave private seed companies legal footing, as well as input-duty exemptions and warehouse-receipt laws that allowed stored grain to serve as collateral.¹⁰⁷ Such rules can strengthen quality and investment, but they must also leave room for locally adapted seed that farmers save and exchange. In Tanzania, it informed the lifting of the cereals export ban, though the policy has since been reversed several times.¹⁰⁸ The lesson was that policy could not be treated as a separate track; it had to be built into programmes from the start, a shift AGRA made in its future work.

Scientific capability

In 2006, fewer than 500 active plant breeders served sub-Saharan Africa outside South Africa¹⁰⁹, breeding programmes lacked funding, and many senior researchers were near retirement. In the early 2010s, the region had about seven agricultural researchers for every 100,000 agricultural workers, compared to 57 in Brazil.¹¹⁰ AGRA supported postgraduate training for around 800 scientists across 14 universities in 10 countries.¹¹¹ It funded two continental centres of excellence – at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and the University of Ghana.¹¹² Many of these scientists now work in research institutes, universities, governments, regional bodies and private companies, where they train future generations of scientists.¹¹³

Farmer organisations

A single smallholder has little bargaining power, cannot gather enough produce to interest a serious buyer, and cannot access finance on workable terms. AGRA's Farmer Organisation Support Centre for Africa (FOSCA) was set up in 2010. By 2014, it had helped 950 farmer groups bundle harvests, negotiate with buyers and reach structured markets – including through the World Food Programme's Purchase for Progress (P4P) initiative, and in some cases, supermarket supply chains.¹¹⁴

“**The biggest thing AGRA did right: once it got somebody trained, it did not turn them loose on their own. It stuck with them, made sure they got a grant at whatever institution they went to, so they could use the training. Then it worked to get a critical mass of well-trained people together at that institution where they could really begin to have impact.**

— Dr Gary Toenniessen, former Managing Director, Rockefeller Foundation; AGRA co-founder

STORY

The regulator who built the rules from scratch

Ghana's Plants and Fertiliser Act created the Pesticide and Fertiliser Regulatory Division to regulate the inputs on which the private seed sector depends. Felicia Ansah-Ampofo led the establishment of the new regulatory body.

“**When we established the Division, we lacked the regulatory structures needed to deliver on our huge mandate. AGRA's support helped us bring together the actors needed to develop and establish these structures. Today, around 1,380 fertiliser retailers, 178 distributors, 45 importers, three manufacturers and 155 products are registered with us.**

— Felicia Ansah-Ampofo, Director, Pesticide and Fertiliser Regulatory Division



STORY

The rice breeder behind nine in 10 of Ghana's rice fields

Dr Maxwell Darko Asante, director, CSIR Crop Research Institute, Kumasi; Ghana's lead rice breeder

He has released more than 20 rice varieties, now planted across more than 90% of Ghana's rice area and also grown in The Gambia and Sierra Leone. He completed an AGRA-funded PhD at the West Africa Centre for Crop Improvement in 2013. A USD 184,700 AGRA reintegration grant the following year allowed him to build a fully operational breeding programme. He has since secured more than USD 5 million in investment, and in 2018 was named Ghana's Best National Agricultural Researcher.

What the first decade revealed

"Siloed funding drives siloed programmes, and siloed programmes restrict integrated investment and delivery."

2016 independent evaluation¹¹⁵

- The pieces had to work together.

Better seed achieved less without healthy soils, advice and finance. Higher yields did not reliably raise incomes without storage and buyers.

- Solutions had to be locally adapted and owned.

The strongest results reflected work with local soils, crops and markets, and were carried forward by African scientists, businesses and public institutions. Training and early grants had greater value when these actors had the resources to continue the work.

- Policy could strengthen or weaken programme gains.

Changes to trade, input and procurement policies could reinforce progress or undermine what programmes had achieved.

- Scale had to come through others.

AGRA could help establish a business, prove an approach or remove a constraint, but governments, businesses and funders were needed to take that progress much further.

These lessons defined the challenge AGRA carried into its second decade.

“Everybody agrees AGRA's initial phase delivered some important structural achievements – professionalising the seed sector, strengthening plant-breeding capacity, and supporting the development of local seed enterprises. These were significant foundations, and the next opportunity is to build on them in a more coordinated and integrated way.

— Yvonne Pinto, Director General, International Rice Research Institute (IRRI); former Programme Officer and AGRA Manager, Gates Foundation

AGRA 2.0

Starting to connect the pieces, 2017 – 2022

AGRA 2.0 was built on the premise that transformation had to be led and delivered at country level. It combined two approaches: strengthening national systems and policies, and concentrating integrated delivery in selected regions and value chains. AGRA moved from thematic programmes managed from Nairobi to country programmes anchored in national agricultural plans. Area-based consortia then brought seed, soil health, extension, aggregation, markets and finance together for the same farmers, places and priority crops.

AGRA's country focus reflected a wider continental shift. The first CAADP Biennial Review in 2017¹⁰⁶ publicly compared country performance, encouraging governments and partners to organise support around national results.

Countries started from different positions: some still lacked essential foundations, while others were ready to build on existing progress. AGRA opened offices in 11 focus countries and worked with governments on programmes suited to their priorities and conditions.



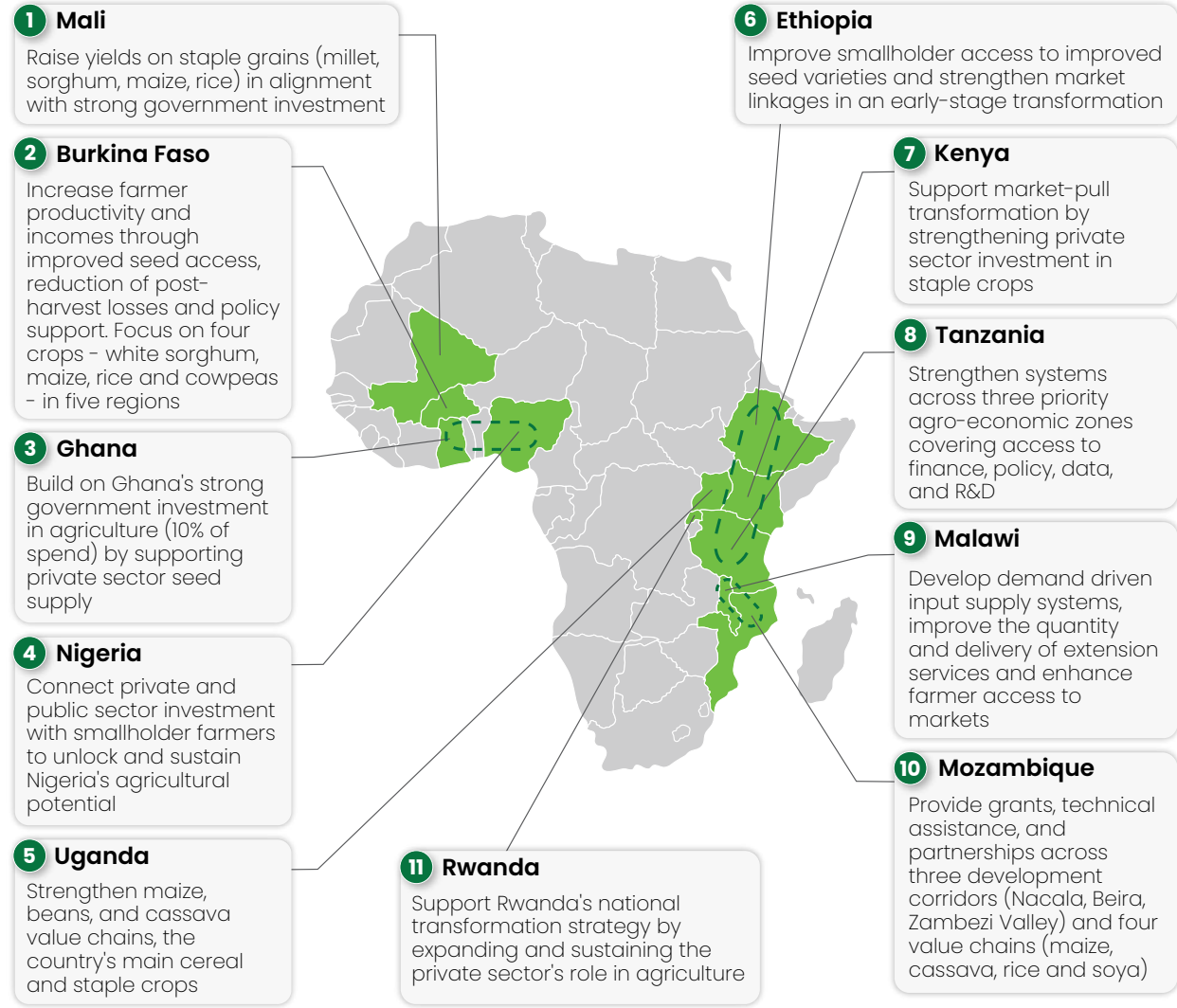
AGRA selected the 11 countries based on these criteria:

- **AGRA's existing assets and value proposition** (including existing network of local partners-grantees)
- **Government commitment to agriculture**
- **Potential for impact** (including opportunities for private sector engagement)

Exhibit 26

What AGRA 2.0 set out to do – combining national system-building with concentrated delivery

 Focus agro-ecological zones that overlap with targeted countries



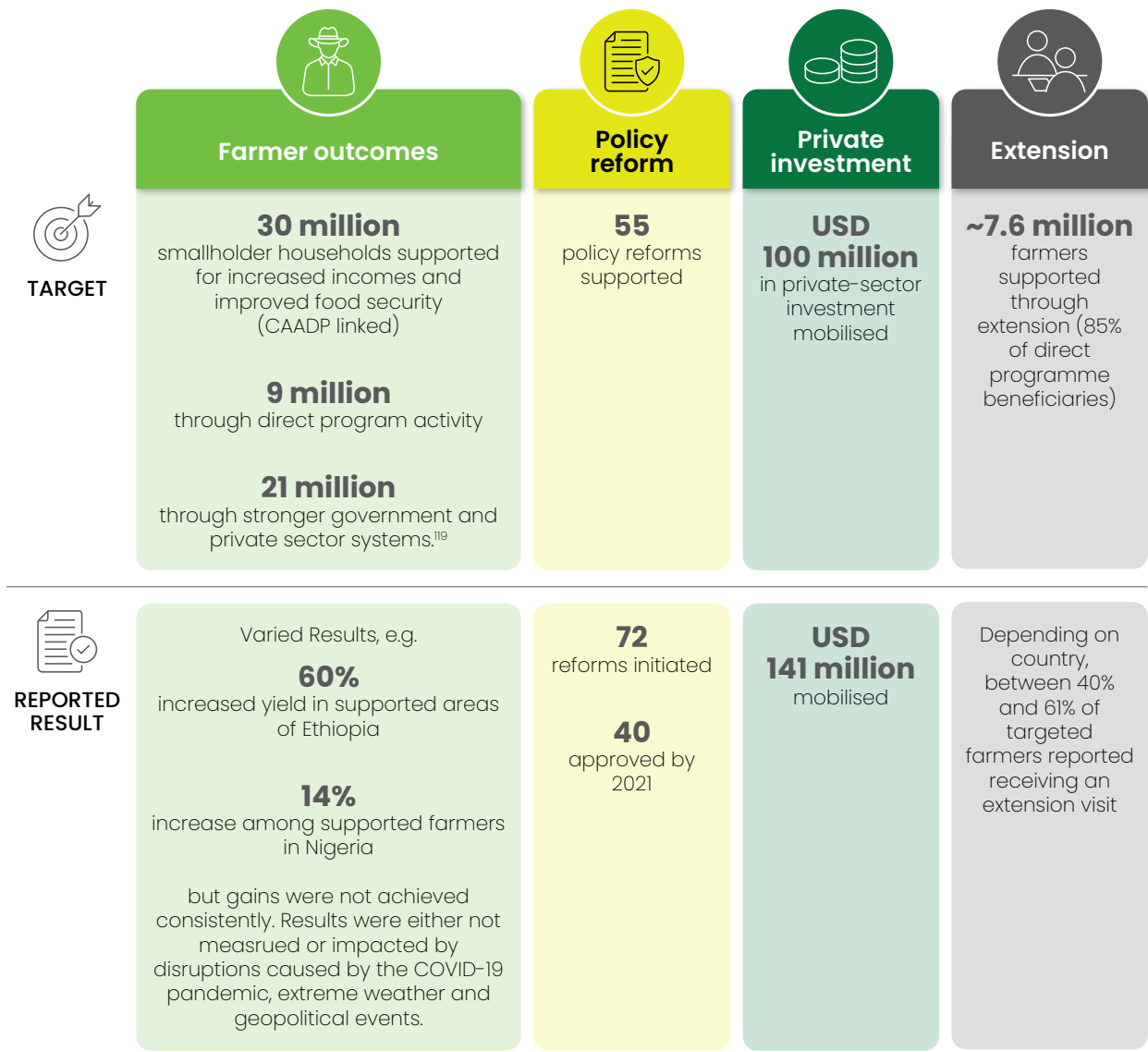
The strategy targeted three milestones at which progress could sustain itself: (i) farmers earned enough to reinvest; (ii) input suppliers, buyers and other businesses could operate without continued subsidy; and (iii) sustained progress over 10 to 20 years allowed agriculture to drive wider economic

development. AGRA focused on the first two while supporting the policy and market conditions needed for the third. This depended on government leadership and partners able to bring investment, expertise and delivery at scale.¹¹⁷

AGRA 2.0: Connecting the pieces at country level

The aim was to integrate production, markets, finance and policy around national priorities, with delivery concentrated in selected regions and value chains.

Selected impact summary.¹¹⁸ Results reflect targeted farmers and areas rather than entire countries. Outcomes varied considerably by country.



Large pools of public, private and development finance were available across the sector. AGRA 2.0 sought to use its resources, relationships and expertise to help bring more of that investment behind coherent country priorities. AGRA leveraged its grants across the agrifood space, often to unlock catalytic opportunities. Between 2017 and 2021, AGRA made **530 grants of USD 113**

million to more than 500 organisations across its 11 focus countries.¹²⁰

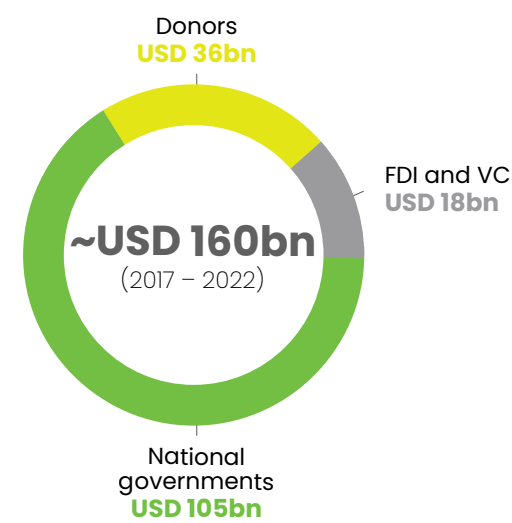
This logic shaped AGRA 2.0 at two levels. Country programmes worked with governments to align policy, planning and investment nationally. Area-based consortia brought partners and resources together around selected places and value chains.



Exhibit 27

AGRA 2.0 sought to align larger pools of investment behind country priorities

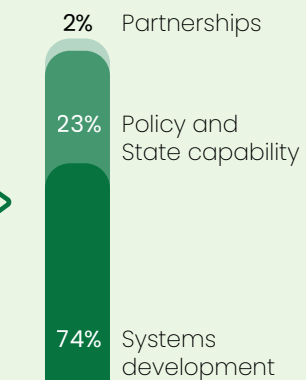
Funding for agriculture, Africa, 2017 – 2022 cumulative, USD bn



AGRA catalytic grant funding in numbers, PIATA 2017 – 2022



AGRA funding in the period by thematic area



Source: Governments: ReSAKSS government agriculture expenditure, Africa-wide, constant 2015 USD, sum of 2017–2022 (USD 105bn). Donors: FAO/OECD development flows to agriculture, Africa ≈USD 5–8bn/yr, ≈USD 36bn cumulative. Private sector: greenfield agrifood FDI (≈USD 14bn per 5 years, USDA ERS 2022, scaled) plus agrifoodtech VC (≈USD 1bn, AgFunder); excludes domestic private investment and bank lending. AGRA: USD 113.5m catalytic grants (Mathematica PIATA Final Evaluation; AGRA Life of Strategy Report).

Concentrating delivery through consortia

Consortia were the main vehicle for concentrating AGRA's work geographically and accounted for roughly one-third of AGRA 2.0 funding. In selected regions and staple-crop value chains, they brought input suppliers, extension providers, farmer organisations, financiers and buyers behind a shared plan.

By 2022, AGRA had helped establish 23 consortia across seven countries, reaching eight million farmers and engaging around 4,000 buyers. AGRA's USD 45 million investment in the model helped attract a further USD 660 million in private investment.¹²¹

Improving farmer productivity and resilience

AGRA 2.0 reorganised its productivity work to bring seed, soil health and extension together for the same farmers and places. By 2022, AGRA-supported enterprises were producing more than 125,000 tonnes of certified seed a year, around 50 times the starting volume. Across six countries, 1.2 million tonnes of soil- and crop-tailored fertiliser blends had been produced.¹²³ The Village-Based Advisor model became the main instrument for connecting services at the community level: locally based advisors linked advice, inputs and market information in one interaction. More than 33,000 advisors were trained across nine countries, reaching at least 60% of AGRA-supported farmers, and many took on commercial roles, with 35% selling seed and 27% fertiliser.¹²⁴ By 2021, 75% of supported farmers were using fertiliser, 48% improved seed and 60% improved post-harvest practices.¹²⁵ Working within communities also helped reach women often missed by agro-dealer networks.¹²⁶ Between 2018 and 2020, women VBAs helped reach 3.5 million women with extension services.¹²⁷ More than half of these advisors earned income by connecting farmers to markets, and 20% started their own business.¹²⁸ In Mozambique, for example, 83% of trained advisors (500 out of 600) were active post-grant. A wider survey in December 2022 across five countries found a similar pattern, with 80% of trained advisors still active.¹²⁹

Results were substantial in some places, but were not replicated consistently across countries and programmes, often undermined by COVID-19 and political, trade and security shocks. Maize yields rose by around 60% in AGRA-supported districts in Ethiopia relative to comparison districts, 14% among supported farmers in Nigeria and 6% in Ghana. Higher yields did not consistently translate into food security: over the same period, reported food insecurity among supported farmers rose by around 19% in Nigeria and 5% in Ghana, with little change in Burkina Faso.¹³⁰

The same evaluation identified four drivers behind these uneven productivity results: improved seed, fertiliser, extension, and finance – with complete data available for Burkina Faso, Ghana and Nigeria. Of these, Nigeria was the only country where farmers had all four at once; the country recorded the clearest gains.

AGRA also supported climate-smart and regenerative approaches. Among participating farmers in Nigeria and Burkina Faso, maize yields rose by 54% and 135% respectively, and rice yields by 54% and 25%.¹³¹ In eastern Kenya, a regenerative-agriculture programme reached more than 120,000 farmers through 635 Village-Based Advisors.¹³²

Shocks exposed the fragility of productivity gains

Climate shocks and supply disruptions could still undo gains made on farms. In 2019, Cyclone Idai destroyed more than 715,000 hectares of crops in Mozambique, much of it during the main harvest.¹³³ COVID-19 later disrupted trade and input supplies and caused fertiliser shortages. In Kenya, AGRA supported the Ministry of Agriculture's food-security "war room" alongside more than 80 partners; this work later informed a continental food-security platform with the African Union Commission.¹³⁴

STORY

A consortium that turned beans into an export line (Tanzania)

Farmers in Tanzania's southern highlands sat in a productive zone yet struggled to convert surplus into income, held back by weak coordination between input suppliers, farmer groups and buyers. AGRA's Ihemi-Ludewa consortium brought five partners together around an animal-feed exporter, supplying quality bean seed on credit to kick-start production.

In the first season, 15 cooperatives covering 4,520 farmers delivered 2,260 tonnes of export-quality beans; by 2020 membership had grown to 28 cooperatives and more than 8,500 farmers. Across the consortium, USD 2.09 million of direct investment leveraged nearly USD 44.5 million in private investment, including new warehouses and milling plants.¹²²

We have seen great changes and profits because of big consignments sold and the presence of stable markets and a good business environment between us and the farmers.

— Mr Philemon Nathan Mtewe, CEO of Mtewe General Supply

“**AGRA-supported models have transitioned smallholder farmers from subsistence to profitable, commercial agriculture, reducing the probability of participating households remaining in poverty from 45% to 16%. The program further boosted prosperity by replacing predatory middlemen with aggregated market access and providing direct access to quality inputs.**

— Ayodeji Balogun, CEO, AFEX Commodities Exchange¹³⁵

Strengthening output markets and finance

AGRA sought to help farmers turn higher production into income by connecting them to buyers and reducing post-harvest losses. AGRA-supported consortia linked more than 480,000 farmers in Kaduna State, Nigeria, to structured markets between 2018 and 2020, while post-harvest initiatives reached 133,000 households in Mali.¹³⁶

Two million farmers opened digital accounts, and NIRSAL, which AGRA helped design, was capitalised by Nigeria's Central Bank at USD 500 million and generated USD 3 billion in lending commitments. Yet only 85,000 of those farmers accessed input loans and 45,000 obtained insurance, while the share of targeted smallholder maize farmers receiving loans fell from about 2% to 1.3%.¹³⁷ One constraint was that Nigeria's 2019 Warehouse Receipts Bill was never signed into law amid concerns that it conflicted with other legislation.¹³⁸ Without legal standing as collateral, warehouse receipts could not enable smallholders to borrow against their stored grain.

AGRA also helped establish the USD 50 million Agri-Business Capital (ABC) Fund in 2019,

contributing USD 5 million in first-loss capital alongside IFAD, the European Commission, the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Luxembourg and Bank of America. IFAD and the European Commission separately funded technical assistance for investees. By December 2021, the independently managed fund had issued 24 loans worth USD 32.7 million, reportedly reaching 170,000 farmers.¹³⁹

The fund was not connected closely enough to AGRA's country programmes and AGRA did not prepare its consortia and agribusinesses to access the fund, while the fund manager made limited use of pipelines created through AGRA- and IFAD-supported programmes and did not attract enough additional capital. A new fund manager appointed in 2026 is expected to expand the fund and build stronger links with these programmes.

Despite these efforts, the end-of-period Mathematical evaluation found that AGRA reached more farmers through extension and input-market improvements than through output-market and finance improvements in its 2.0 consortia model. This was in part due to AGRA's stronger track record and expertise in input systems. AGRA 3.0's market systems approach is designed to close this gap.¹⁴⁰



STORY

How 33 countries built a rice plan together

Africa's appetite for rice grew faster than its farms could keep up, and the gap was filled by imports that left many countries exposed to fluctuations in the global price. Launched in 2008 by AGRA, JICA and NEPAD, the Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD) helped governments formulate, align and implement National Rice Development Strategies (NRDS) and backed the rice value chain including the seed systems and market development to deliver them.

Sub-Saharan rice production, around 14 million tonnes in the mid-2000s, was reported to have reached 38 million tonnes by 2024, with 33 out of 37 member countries adopting NRDS.

“**We have been trained on better farming techniques. We have learnt to plant WSRC (Water Saving Rice Culture) which produces better quality rice and is profitable.**

— Michael Kinyua, rice farmer

“We approached AGRA immediately after the AfCFTA Secretariat was established, because I am conscious of what we are good at and what we are not. Our mandate is eliminating intra-Africa barriers to agricultural products. To achieve that, you need a partner with the technical expertise to facilitate the inclusion of smallholder farmers into continental value chains.

— H.E. Wamkele Mene, Secretary-General, AfCFTA Secretariat

Backing women agripreneurs

AGRA 2.0 also built dedicated support for women in agribusiness. The VALUE4HER initiative supported women-led enterprises with training, networking and market linkages, working with 2,000 women-owned or led businesses, 107 women hub agro-dealers and 1,400 women retail agro-dealers; membership in the initiative reached 2,073 companies by the end of 2021.¹⁴¹ In 2021, AGRA inaugurated the VALUE4HER Women Agripreneurs of the Year Awards (WAYA) at the AGRF Summit.¹⁴²

Regional trade and coordination

Many national markets were too small or disconnected to absorb growing production, while limited information made it difficult to match regional surpluses with shortages. During AGRA 2.0, AGRA worked with regional institutions to reduce trade barriers, coordinate cross-border value chains and support tools such as the COMESA Regional Food Balance Sheet, giving governments and businesses a clearer view of regional supply and demand to guide trade and investment.

A major vehicle was the Africa Food Trade and Resilience Programme, introduced with support from the UK Government. Alongside the Regional Food Balance Sheet, it supported the Food Security Monitor and cross-border coordination in rice, horticulture and soybeans. The signing of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement in 2018 provided a wider continental framework for this work.

Regional coordination also extended to specific value chains. The Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD) brought governments and partners together around national rice strategies, seed systems, production and markets.

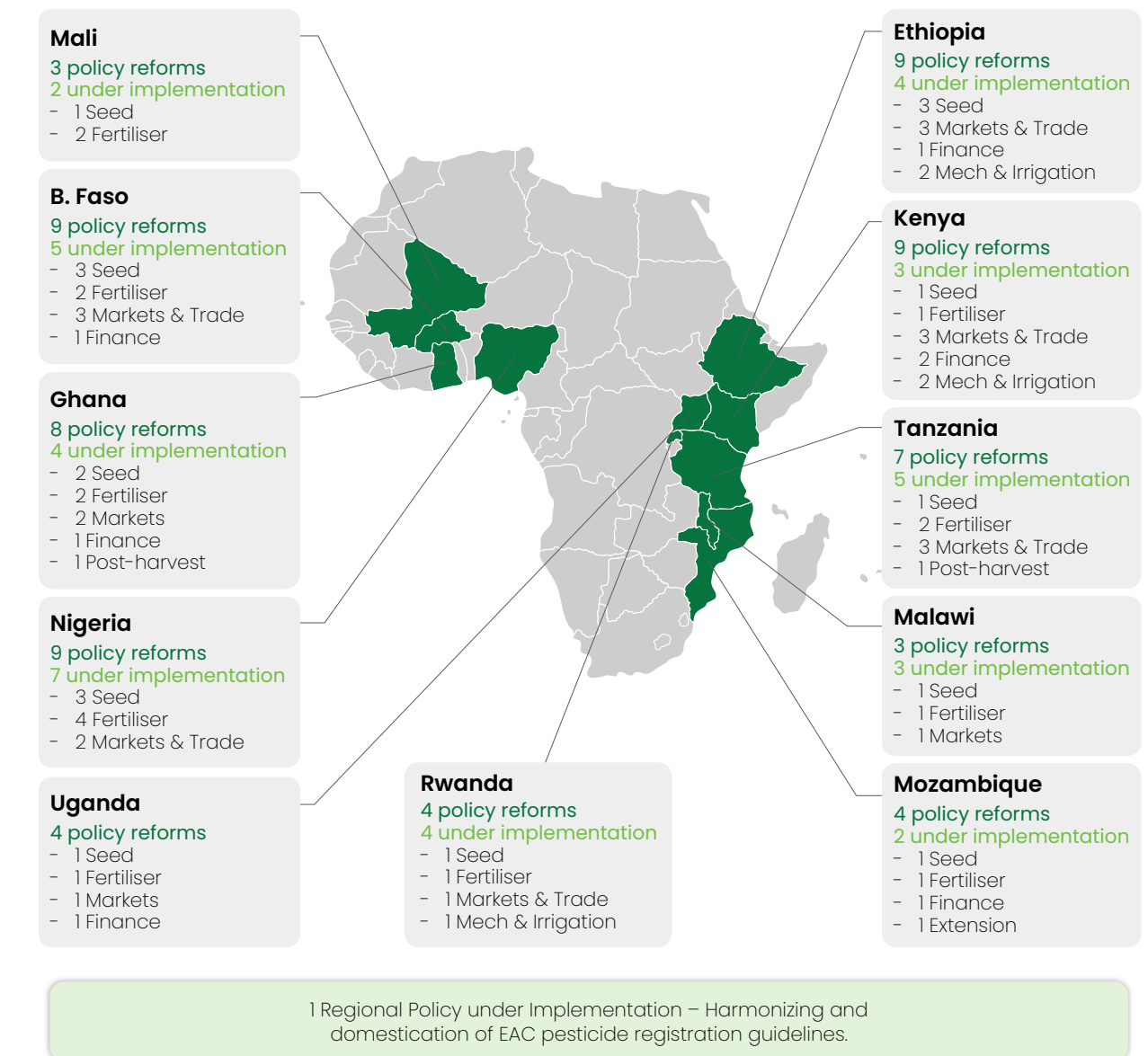
Strengthening policy and investment planning

AGRA's third objective focused on improving the policies and investment plans needed to support transformation. During AGRA 2.0, AGRA helped initiate 72 reforms across its 11 focus countries. Forty had been approved by 2021, while the average time required for approval fell from more than eight years to four.

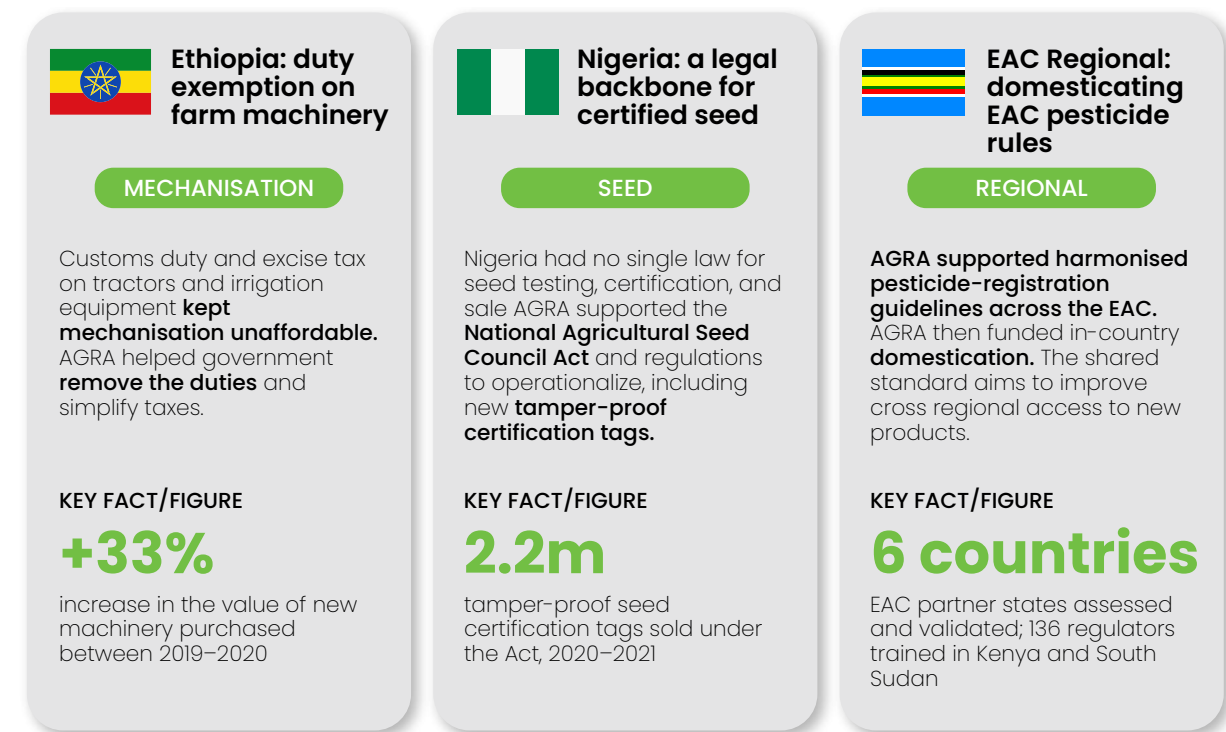
Exhibit 28

AGRA's Micro Policy Reform work

We supported 72 policy reforms across 11 countries and 1 Regional Economic Community and moved 40 of these policies into implementation



Policy reforms in action



Source: AGRA, MIRA Policy Reform Tracker (June 2021); KIT Royal Tropical Institute, PIATA 2021 Outcome Monitoring Report – AGRA Nigeria.

“**AGRA contributed on the monitoring and reporting of the CAADP agenda through the Biennial Review mechanism – sending staff to contribute ideas, but also financing the programmes. The staff seconded to the AU Commission were monitoring-and-evaluation experts who came in specifically to support the Biennial Review.**

— **Dr Godfrey Bahiigwa**, former Director of Agriculture and Rural Development, African Union Commission

The Micro Reforms for African Agribusiness programme targeted specific regulatory barriers affecting seed companies, input suppliers and agro-dealers. Its main focus was securing policy approval, with less attention to governments’ ability to put reforms into practice. To strengthen the uptake of its policy work, AGRA later established the Hub for Agricultural Policy Action (HAPA), with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. HAPA consolidated evidence and translated it into practical, costed policy options in response to government requests.

The same approach was applied to national agriculture investment plans and flagship programmes, cutting average design time from around two years to six months. Working with governments and partners including the World Bank and FAO, AGRA helped to mobilise USD 1.4 billion (USD 400 million from governments and USD 1 billion from multilateral and private sources).¹⁴³ However, plans often stayed centred in agriculture ministries without enough involvement from finance and planning departments, and delivery remained dependent on AGRA support.

Kenya and Ghana showed the importance of implementation. Kenya’s e-voucher system attracted around USD 700 million¹⁴⁴ in private and multilateral capital before a move to state procurement weakened the agro-dealer networks it relied on. Ghana’s Planting for Food and Jobs attracted USD 260 million¹⁴⁵ in co-investment before state distribution crowded out private channels. At the continental level, AGRA supported the CAADP Biennial Review, through which 47 countries tracked commitments, and backed 10 regional trade reforms including export-ban waivers in Malawi, Zambia and Kenya.¹⁴⁶

Partnerships brought scale and continuity

The Partnership for Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Africa (PIATA) united five funding partners behind one African-led strategy: the Gates Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, USAID, the UK’s FCDO and Germany’s BMZ, working through KfW and GIZ. AGRA served as the implementing institution, with one results framework, governance structure and reporting cycle replacing separate arrangements with each funder.¹⁴⁷

PIATA gave AGRA predictable funding over five years rather than a series of short project grants. This made sustained work on state capability, policy reform and consortia possible. It also aligned funding behind AGRA’s strategy and allowed partners to combine expertise and resources, including through joint work on government capability, policy reform and the response to COVID-19.

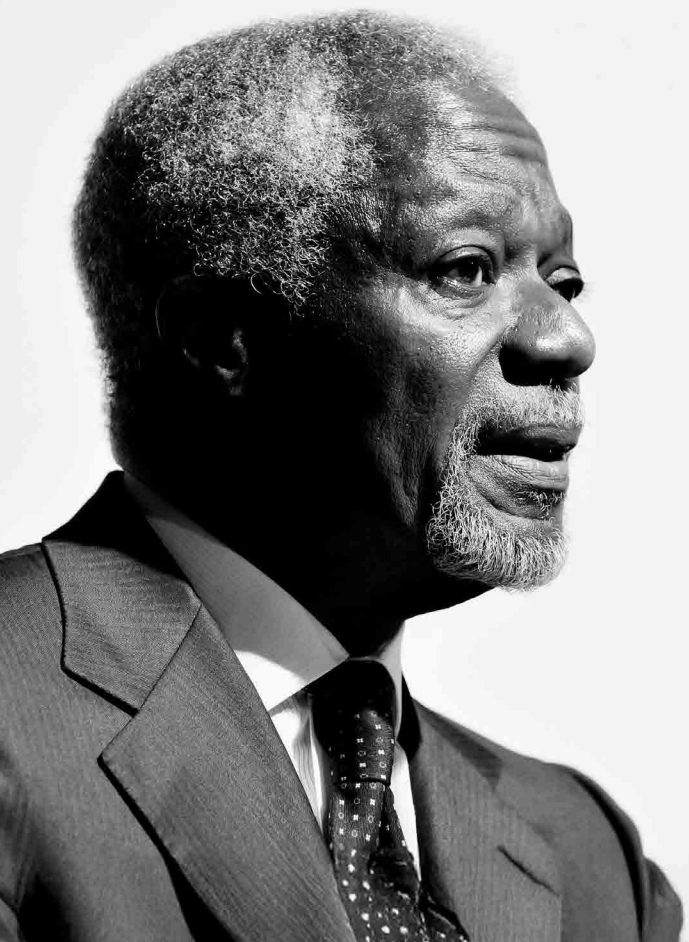
Beyond PIATA, AGRA also worked with other technical and implementing partners during this period, including CGIAR centres on research and seed systems and IFAD on rural finance and market linkages.

Private-sector collaborations brought additional investment and delivery capacity. AGRA reported mobilising USD 141 million against a USD 100 million target through models it helped structure. These included mechanisation and tractor rental with Trotro in Ghana, ETC Agro in Tanzania and Hello Tractor in Kenya; digital extension with Microsoft, reaching around 30,000 farmers through more than 700 Village-Based Advisors; and input distribution with Bayer, Yara and the African Fertiliser and Agribusiness Partnership. The experience also showed that these partnerships could achieve more when designed around AGRA’s country programmes from the outset, an important priority for AGRA 3.0.¹⁴⁸

The Africa Food Systems Forum (AFSF) as a platform for partnership

The Africa Food Systems Forum began in 2006 as the African Green Revolution Conference, a Yara International response to Annan’s call. In 2010, with Annan’s encouragement, it moved to Africa under AGRA’s stewardship, becoming the continent’s largest annual platform for agricultural policy, investment and partnership. It was renamed the Africa Food Systems Forum in 2022.

Today it draws over 4,000 participants a year, including more than 10 current and former heads of state and about 30 ministers, has presented more than USD 5 billion of investment priorities through its Agribusiness Deal Room, and has convened USD 12.5 billion in food-systems commitments to date.

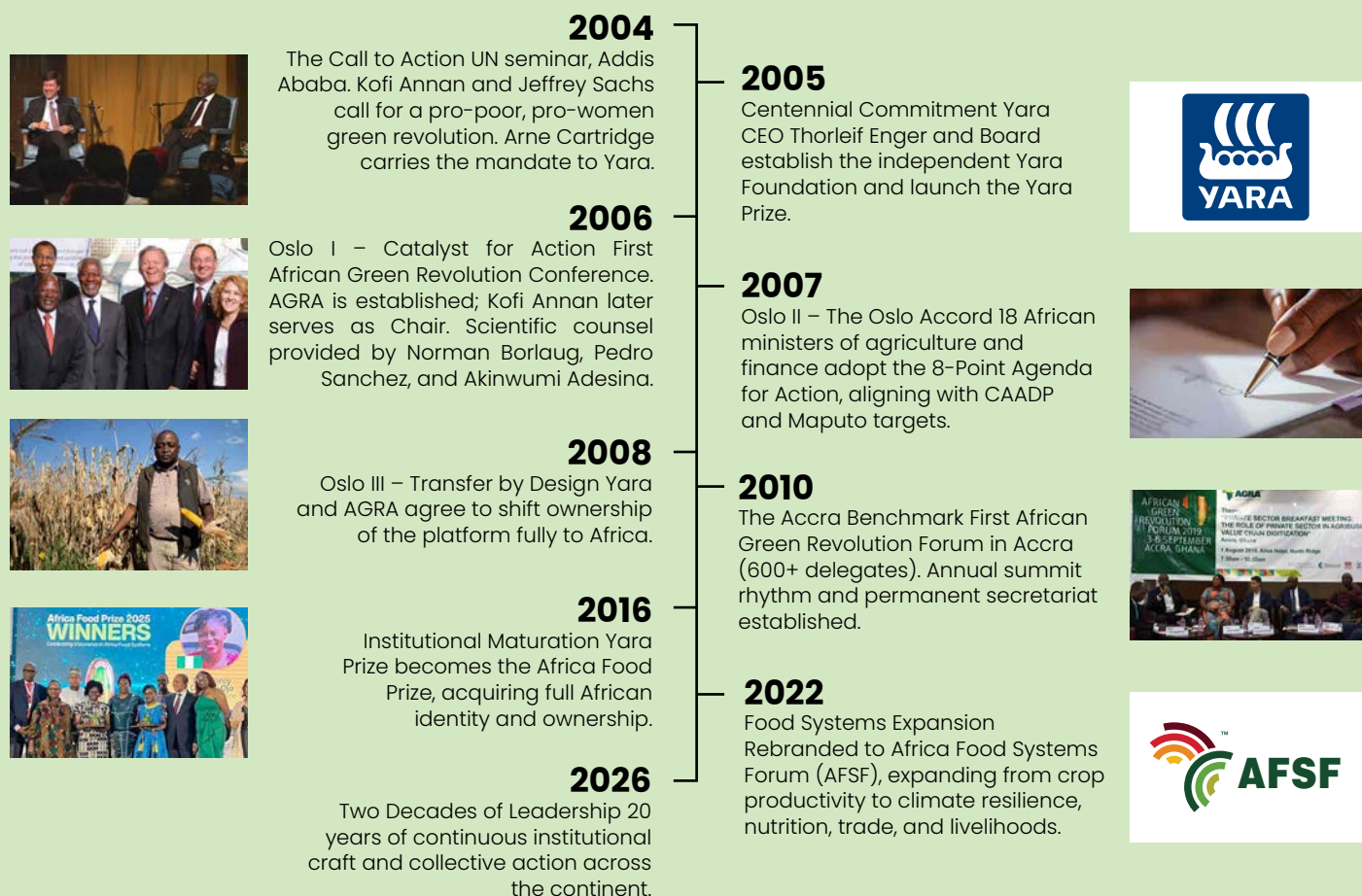


FORESIGHT FEATURE | INSTITUTIONAL LANDMARKS

FROM ADDIS TO AN AFRICAN PLATFORM

In July 2004, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan challenged the world to end chronic hunger through an African-led agricultural transformation. What began as a Yara centennial commitment in Oslo evolved into a continent-owned, multi-stakeholder platform. Today the Africa Food Systems Forum (AFSF)—originally the African Green Revolution Forum—convenes governments, researchers, investors, private enterprise, and farmer organisations to turn shared ambition into policy, investment, and delivery.

20-Year Milestone Timeline



CONVENING POWER AND SYSTEMIC SCALE

How AFSF Unlocks Capital, Aligns Policy, and Drives Action



Africa Food Prize
Recognising Agency

- Honours frontline innovators and scientists (e.g., 2006 Laureates Fidelis Wainaina and Celina Cossa).
- Restores African dignity and humanises leadership.



Africa Food Systems Forum
Organising Collective Action

- Connects individual leadership to finance, infrastructure, markets, and risk tools.
- Brokers smart public-private partnerships and drives CAADP-aligned policy at scale.

18+
Ministers:

African ministers of agriculture and finance united by the 2007 Oslo Accord to establish smart public-private investment frameworks.

600 → 1,000s

Growth in delegate footprint from the inaugural 2010 Accra Forum to present-day continent-wide gatherings.

8
Point Agenda:

Action framework driving smallholder input access, de-risking, market stability, and delivery accountability.

20
Years:

Continuous institutional evolution bridging science, capital, and political commitment.

“**Declarations are only beginnings. The enduring value of the Forum cannot be measured simply by attendance or visibility, but by its ability to align leaders, unlock investment, support country priorities and hold partners to action.**”

— Kofi Annan

Strategic Priorities:

Keep smallholders, women, and young agripreneurs at the centre. Convert high-level political intent into bankable investment pipelines. Strengthen climate adaptation, nutrition security, and intra-African trade. Maintain AFSF as a permanent, African-owned common good.

In partnership with

What the second decade revealed

1

Higher yields needed functioning markets to raise incomes.

Integrated support improved productivity, but without aggregation, storage, working capital and reliable buyers, farmers could not consistently turn additional output into income.

2

Partnerships worked best around a defined place and value chain.

Consortia gave governments, businesses and delivery partners a shared geography, crop and set of outcomes around which to organise their work. Progress was more likely to last where local institutions and businesses could continue it.

3

Plans and policy reforms depended on effective implementation.

They helped align priorities and attract investment, but lasting change required public institutions with the capacity, budgets and political backing to put them into practice.

4

Resilience had to be built in from the start.

Climate shocks, COVID-19 and policy changes could quickly weaken production and market gains. By the end of the period, AGRA had begun developing tools to identify vulnerabilities and target action. ClimVAT mapped exposure to drought, floods and heat, while SeedSAT assessed strengths and gaps in national seed systems.

5

Inclusion had to be designed, not assumed.

Reaching women did not ensure that they captured equal value, while young people needed to be treated as economic actors rather than simply as programme beneficiaries.

These lessons left AGRA with sharper questions for its third decade: who benefited, whether gains lasted and what would turn higher production into stronger livelihoods?

AGRA 3.0

Deepening impact, 2023 – 2028

By 2023, AGRA's experience had shown that higher yields alone did not reliably raise incomes, improve nutrition or build resilience. AGRA 3.0 defined success more broadly: not only by what farmers produced, but by what they earned, whether women and young people found meaningful work, whether nutrition improved and whether gains withstood shocks.

The years from 2020 to 2023 made this shift more urgent. COVID-19 disrupted supply chains, the Russia-Ukraine war raised fertiliser and grain prices, climate shocks intensified and development funding became harder to secure.

“

Thinking also broadened from agricultural production to food systems, connecting production with markets, finance, nutrition, jobs and the natural environment. The 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, which AGRA helped lead, reflected this shift, and later carried into the 2025 Kampala CAADP Declaration.

— H.E. Moses Vilakati, AU Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE), African Union, CAADP Kampala Strategy launch, 6 May 2025.¹⁴⁹



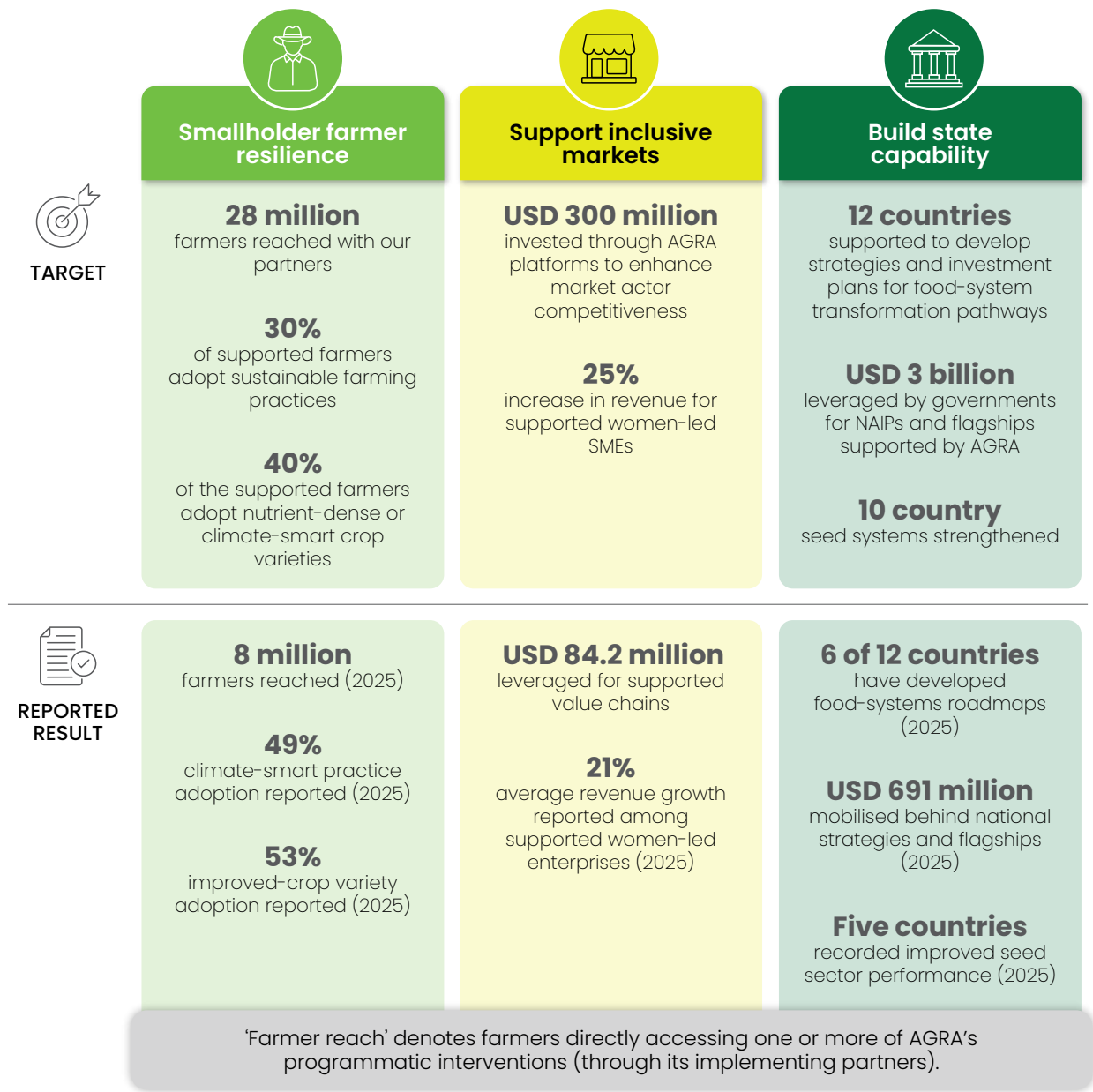
AGRA's name evolved with its mission

As AGRA adopted a food-systems agenda, it also moved from the full name **Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa** to simply **AGRA**. The original name reflected the organisation's founding focus on agricultural productivity. Its new agenda went further, reflecting the shift towards food systems, connecting production with incomes, markets, nutrition, resilience, women and youth, and climate adaptation.

The change did not leave the founding ambition, nor the focus on an alliance, behind. It gave AGRA a name that better reflected how its understanding of transformation had evolved.

AGRA 3.0: Deepening impact across the food system

The aim is to turn production gains into increased and consistent incomes, businesses, jobs, resilience and nutrition.



AGRA 3.0 remains under implementation. Results are preliminary and will be updated as further evidence becomes available.

What is different in AGRA 3.0

AGRA 3.0 retained many of the main technical areas of AGRA's earlier work but placed greater weight on outcomes for farmers, SMEs and the wider food system. In each of 12 priority countries, teams start with a small number of government priorities and organise AGRA's work around them. This approach, building on the consortia model established in 2.0, connects production with markets, finance, policy, nutrition and the natural environment. While it takes a full value-chain approach, it starts with market demand, leverages anchor firms (where relevant) and pro-smallholder business models. AGRA 3.0 also reflects the direction established at the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, which AGRA helped lead, and the 2025 Kampala CAADP Declaration, incorporating a broader food systems lens of programming.

On farms: Higher yields are no longer the endpoint. The goal is higher and more resilient farmer incomes, achieved through production that is profitable, withstands climate shocks, restores depleted soils and protects water and landscapes. AGRA supports locally suited seed, soil-health and advisory systems and helps connect production to demand for more diverse and nutritious food.¹⁵⁰

In markets and finance: Access alone is not enough. Farmers need reliable and profitable sales, agribusinesses need capital to grow, and financiers need commercially viable investment opportunities. AGRA helps farmer organisations and businesses to secure buyers and works with financial institutions to reduce lending risk through risk-sharing and blended finance.¹⁵¹

State capability: AGRA 2.0 helped secure approval for 40 reforms but showed that approval did not guarantee implementation. This gap directly shapes AGRA 3.0's greater focus on public sector implementation capacity. Towards this, AGRA is increasingly working with government teams to help resolve constraints facing rural market actors; to set priorities, prepare and fund investment plans, coordinate around priority value chains and strengthen the institutions responsible for implementation.¹⁵²





10m Young people

targeted to benefit
from **AGRA's youth
employment initiative**
by 2028.

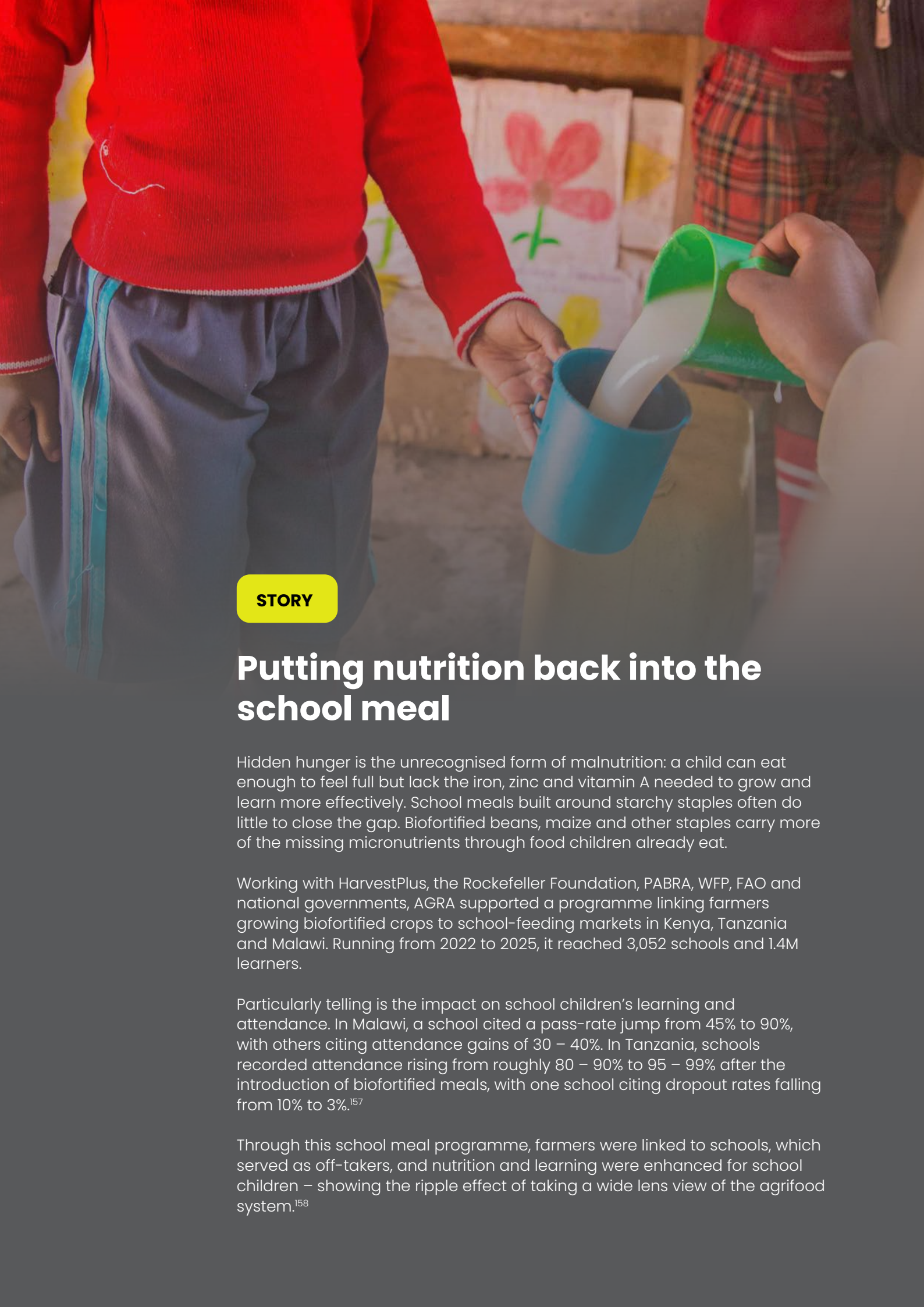
Women's economic power: Earlier programmes reached women, but participation did not ensure equal income, influence or opportunity. Under 3.0, gender indicators have been introduced into seed-system assessments in Ethiopia and Nigeria, a policy scorecard has been used in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi, and gender targets have entered AGRA's grants. Building on VALUE4HER and WAYA, both launched under AGRA 2.0, the fifth edition of WAYA in 2025 awarded USD 300,000 to ten winners selected from nearly 2,000 applicants, and VALUE4HER continues to support women-led businesses with leadership, finance and market access.¹⁵³

Youth employment: Youth employment has moved from a collection of programmes to a strategic priority. AGRA brought Generation Africa into its structure in 2023, including the GoGettaz Prize and Generation Africa Fellowship. Its largest youth initiative, developed with the Mastercard Foundation, aims to reach 10 million young people to support 1.5 million transitions into dignified and fulfilling work, at least half of them young women, by 2029.¹⁵⁴

Climate resilience and natural resources: Climate risk now informs choices about seed, soil health, water, value chains and investment. The aim is not only to help production withstand drought, floods and heat, but to rebuild the soils and landscapes on which future production depends.¹⁵⁵

Nutrition and healthier diets: Nutrition now shapes what farmers produce, what markets make available and affordable, and what governments support. AGRA's Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture Mainstreaming Strategy brings crop diversity and nutrient-dense varieties into investment, value-chain development and measurement.¹⁵⁶

AGRA now places greater weight on income, jobs, resilience, inclusion and nutrition alongside production.



STORY

Putting nutrition back into the school meal

Hidden hunger is the unrecognised form of malnutrition: a child can eat enough to feel full but lack the iron, zinc and vitamin A needed to grow and learn more effectively. School meals built around starchy staples often do little to close the gap. Biofortified beans, maize and other staples carry more of the missing micronutrients through food children already eat.

Working with HarvestPlus, the Rockefeller Foundation, PABRA, WFP, FAO and national governments, AGRA supported a programme linking farmers growing biofortified crops to school-feeding markets in Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi. Running from 2022 to 2025, it reached 3,052 schools and 1.4M learners.

Particularly telling is the impact on school children's learning and attendance. In Malawi, a school cited a pass-rate jump from 45% to 90%, with others citing attendance gains of 30 – 40%. In Tanzania, schools recorded attendance rising from roughly 80 – 90% to 95 – 99% after the introduction of biofortified meals, with one school citing dropout rates falling from 10% to 3%.¹⁵⁷

Through this school meal programme, farmers were linked to schools, which served as off-takers, and nutrition and learning were enhanced for school children – showing the ripple effect of taking a wide lens view of the agrifood system.¹⁵⁸



STORY

Four partners, one groundnut value chain

Smallholder groundnut farmers in Malawi were caught in a familiar trap of low yields, weak bargaining power and no route to formal markets. Between 2021 and 2023, AGRA and UNDP co-designed the SAPMaRT project, funded through the Global Environment Facility, bringing off-takers, an input and aflatoxin-management supplier and the fertiliser-partnership platform together with government extension across seven districts.

The project reached 21,900 farmers, more than 9,000 of them women, against a target of 20,000. Yields rose 36%, from 0.96 to 1.3 tonnes per hectare, and 5,694 tonnes were aggregated and sold through 14 new storage centres. This is a case study that Chapter 3 draws on to show what bringing the various stakeholders together looks like on the ground.¹⁵⁹

Early results under AGRA 3.0

Around eighteen months into implementation, AGRA 3.0 is showing positive early results. The 2025 Annual Outcome Survey covered six countries in depth, supported by routine monitoring across all twelve. The findings reflect AGRA's contribution alongside governments, businesses, financiers and other partners.

Production and government support show the strongest progress. Among targeted farmers, maize yields increased by 26%, with larger gains in rice and soybean, though gains varied by geography. Over half adopted improved, nutrient-dense or climate-smart varieties. Extension coverage exceeded its target. Six countries developed food-systems strategies, 49% of targeted priority reforms are under various stages of implementation and the CAADP Biennial Review is now used across the continent.¹⁶⁰

Progress is also emerging beyond production. Among supported smallholder farmers, crop sales rose by 10.5%, structured-market participation tripled from its baseline to 31%, and enterprise revenues increased, although

the gains differed across countries.¹⁶¹ Access to the growth capital needed to expand enterprises remained limited, however.

For supported women farmers, the productivity gap narrowed by 16%, while access to extension and improved seed moved closer to the programme average. In the Youth Entrepreneurship for the Future of Food and Agriculture (YEFFA) Programme, more than one million young people received work-enabling support and 176,741 moved into new or improved work, with broadly equal outcomes for young women and men. Nearly 29,000 met the standard for dignified and fulfilling work. Most gains so far have improved existing livelihoods; creating new work at scale remains an important test.¹⁶²

Early progress is also visible in stronger relationships between actors, greater youth voice and closer policy alignment. These are encouraging results, but meeting the strategy's targets will require accelerated progress in finance, markets, enterprise growth and new employment.



Through strategic partnerships like AGRA's YEFFA initiative, we are witnessing the exact future of African agriculture, one driven by youth-led innovation, modern technology, and local solutions like agricultural drones. Tanzania remains fully committed to nurturing this young talent, backing their brilliant minds with direct financial support, and transforming our food systems for generations to come.

— H.E. Samia Suluhu Hassan¹⁶³

AGRA's 20-year impact and what it reveals

Over the past twenty years, Africa's agrifood ecosystem has changed significantly in many areas where AGRA worked: local seed industries have grown, inputs and advisory services have moved closer to farmers, markets and financing models have developed, and policy and planning have improved in many countries. These changes were substantial in places, but the evidence does not show that AGRA's headline household-level ambitions were achieved at the intended scale.

Governments, farmers, businesses, researchers and development partners drove progress, with AGRA helping to build institutions,

capabilities and partnerships. Exhibit 30 does not present that progress as AGRA's contribution alone but shows collaborative work with diverse actors in an increasingly complex food systems space. It shows what changed, where AGRA contributed and what needs to happen next.

These building blocks do not by themselves equal a transformation. Twenty years of building these foundations revealed five broader lessons about how agricultural transformation happens.



Exhibit 30

What AGRA helped to build

	The historical situation	What AGRA contributed	What remains to be addressed
 Seed systems	Only about 12 private African seed companies in SSA (outside South Africa) in the early 90s and under 500 crop scientists continent-wide.	118 seed companies and over 650 improved seed varieties released.	Quality seed still reaches too few farmers; many breeding and regulatory bodies remain underfunded.
 Soil and input access	Depleting soils, fertiliser use of 8 kg per hectare and many farmers 30+ km from a supplier, 20 years ago.	25,000 supported agro-dealers, 33,000 community extensionists and more than 5 million farmers trained on soil health and climate-smart practices.	Fertiliser and lime stay costly and hard to reach, and degradation continues across large areas.
 Access to markets	Smallholders lacked routes to buyers, storage, market addition information and bargaining power.	Over 20 years integrating farmers into targeted value chain development for rice, pulses, sorghum, millet, potatoes, maize, cassava and wheat.	Structured trade reaches few farmers; finance, infrastructure, storage, agroprocessing and farmer-offtaker contracting remain constraints.
 Finance and enterprise	Banks put less than 3% of lending into agriculture, with smallholders worst served.	Risk sharing, blended and value chain financing models developed, lender partnerships and challenge funds.	The financing gap stays vast: affordable credit, insurance and growth capital remain out of reach.
 Scientific capability	Underfunded research programmes, with many senior scientists nearing retirement.	Postgraduate training for about 800 scientists, two centres of excellence and a new generation of researchers.	Africa has too few researchers, and institutions lack the funding and pathways to retain talent.
 Policy and government capability	Fragmented planning, with businesses and farmer groups holding little policy influence.	Strengthened government planning and coordination, reforms across seed, fertiliser and trade, and stronger CAADP accountability.	Weak delivery and coordination mechanisms, implementation challenges, and limited public-private collaboration.
 Partnerships	Funders and programmes worked separately, reaching farmers through disconnected projects.	USD 2.5b mobilised across private and public sector.	Coordination gaps among strategic partners remain.
 Women, youth and nutrition	Gender, youth and nutrition rarely built into mainstream agricultural programmes.	Platforms for women-led agribusinesses and young entrepreneurs. 176,000 new, improved or additional work opportunities for youth.	Considerable structural challenges for youth and women remain.

Five lessons from twenty years

1. Transformation requires an integrated approach

- Production is necessary but not sufficient; yields rose without incomes
- Without markets and finance, production gains are easily eroded
- Siloed funding produced siloed programming – the design, not just the delivery, needed to be bundled

2. Markets and institutions drive success

- Stronger institutions and government capability make gains last
- Grants start systems; commercial incentives are what sustain them
- Gains held where a commercial actor with a real market anchored delivery
- Plan for sustainability, exit and state capacity (national or subnational) from the outset

3. Political economy is central to sustainable impact

- Government commitment and leadership is the foundation it all builds on
- An approved reform is not necessarily delivered. Policy implementation capacity has to be built for tangible wins
- Reform moves fastest when the right people convene around one bottleneck
- A single policy reversal can undo years of market-building

4. AGRA must play a catalytic role

- Catalytic partnerships matter; AGRA's own funding is never enough
- Financing deals were most successfully catalysed by sharing risk with banks, not by managing funds directly
- Catalysis worked best where it created its own incentive to continue

5. Intentionality around the protagonist matters

- Inclusion has to be designed in, not assumed during programme design
- Without dedicated pathways, youth stay on the margins of farmer-focused programmes
- The barrier for women was rarely opportunity – it was time; women had less to spend on the trainings meant to include them

Partnership is key

VBAs, agro-dealers, farmer organisations, NGOs, funders, governments and farmers make delivery happen together

Source: AGRA Institutional Evaluation (Dalberg, 2016); PATA FAO Evaluation (Mattersphere, 2021); AGRA Life of Strategy report (2021–2024); AGRA Executive Support report; AGRA Independent Review of 2016–2024; AGRA Outcome Survey.

Implications for AGRA

Twenty years of experience point to where AGRA can have the greatest impact. AGRA already works beyond the programmes it funds, using its relationships with governments, continental institutions, businesses and development partners to improve policy, strengthen institutions and align delivery. The opportunity now is to make this a much more deliberate and central part of its role. Agrifood transformation takes sustained effort over decades, so progress must be carried by institutions with the capability, resources and commitment to see it through. AGRA can help those institutions lead, bring others behind their priorities and sustain action long after individual programmes end. This report points to five priorities for strengthening that role.

Use AGRA’s resources (technical expertise, relationships and financial) to unlock much larger action. AGRA can place greater weight behind priorities that have government ownership, strong market potential and a credible route to larger public and private investment. Its grants and technical support remain important, but their greatest value lies in what they enable others to do.

Put government capability and policy delivery closer to the heart of AGRA’s work. Policies and investment plans only matter when institutions can implement them. AGRA can work more deeply with governments to set priorities, strengthen delivery, attract investment and help the wider ecosystem respond to national needs.

Make coordination a core driver of impact. AGRA should help governments and other African institutions, including producer organisations, cooperatives and industry

bodies, bring public and private actors together around defined country and value-chain priorities. Where invited, AGRA can take a more hands-on role to move delivery forward, while building the ownership and capability of the institution best placed to sustain the work. The form and depth of AGRA’s engagement should differ by country, reflecting local needs, institutions and opportunities. These priorities should also be shaped so that women and young people share in the benefits, and value chains deliver nutrition as well as volume.

Measure impact at the level AGRA seeks to change. Direct results for farmers and businesses remain important, but current measures do not fully capture AGRA’s growing role in policy, inclusion, institutional change and coordination. At country and regional level, where many actors and external forces shape outcomes, AGRA needs credible ways to assess its contribution to wider change while remaining accountable for the resources it receives.

Use country experience to shape continental action. Work in countries reveals the constraints holding back investment and delivery on the ground. AGRA can use that experience to help continental and regional institutions address problems that countries cannot solve alone, including trade barriers, inconsistent standards, fragmented markets and the movement of knowledge and investment across borders.



CHAPTER 3

Africa's path forward: Navigating the next twenty years

The stakes for the next 20 years are high. Africa can turn its agrifood economy into an engine of transformation, but only by shifting from fragmented interventions to integrated and politically backed agendas.

KEY MESSAGES

1. Africa can still turn its agrifood sector into an engine of prosperity, but a change in trajectory is needed.

On the current path, hunger and poverty will rise, while food supply will fail to keep pace with growing urban demand, leading to higher food prices and slower economic growth. By contrast, accelerated transformation would add USD 1 trillion to the continent's GDP by 2045 and fuel broad-based opportunity.

2. Powerful forces are reshaping the sector.

Intensifying climate risks, worsening land degradation and declining donor finance are making transformation harder. At the same time, rising urban food demand and population density, access to breakthrough technology and more open regional markets create major opportunities.

3. The need for an integrated agenda is clear; the task now is to implement it coherently.

Profitable and resilient farms, stronger links to demand, growing markets and value addition, access to finance and supportive institutions must all be tackled together, in ways suited to each place and value chain.

4. Transformation requires capable institutions and sustained coordination.

Producers, businesses, financiers and public institutions must align around defined outcomes, agree responsibilities, sequence complementary investments, resolve bottlenecks and track delivery. Too often, this work lacks sustained commitment, clear ownership and accountability.

5. State capacity is indispensable, but governments cannot deliver system transformation alone.

Governments must set predictable rules, fund public goods and protect the public interest. Producer organisations, industry leaders and regional bodies can also help orchestrate transformation through a variety of mechanisms.

The future Africa can build

By 2035, African Union member states aim to increase agrifood output by 45%, halve post-harvest losses, triple intra-African trade in agrifood products and inputs, and raise the share of locally processed food to 35% of agrifood GDP.¹⁶⁴ These targets sit alongside commitments to reduce hunger and poverty, improve access to healthy diets, increase inclusion and protect more households from shocks. Beyond 2035, agrifood transformation could unlock over USD 1 trillion in new annual GDP and fuel broad-based opportunity across the economy.

To achieve these goals, African countries can build on the foundations developed over the past 20 years. Farmers have better access to inputs and markets, new financing instruments have been established, countries have developed CAADP compacts and investment plans, and the AfCFTA provides a framework for regional food trade. But these foundations have not yet produced broad-based transformation. The task now is to turn them into productive, connected and resilient agrifood systems that raise incomes, make healthy food more affordable, create value beyond the farm and drive the growth of the wider economy.

The continent's current trajectory remains inadequate: agricultural production will continue to expand, but labour productivity, market integration and producer incomes are not improving fast enough to generate structural transformation.

Without a course correction, including faster productivity growth and more value addition on the continent, demand is likely to grow faster than African producers' ability to meet it competitively. Production will remain concentrated in staple grains, roots and tubers, even while demand accelerates for fruits and vegetables, dairy, eggs, meat and fish. Much of the additional supply would still come from farming more land and herding more animals rather than producing more value from existing resources, adding pressure to soils, water, forests and biodiversity.¹⁶⁵

The consequences extend well beyond a food-import bill that could double to USD 130 billion by 2035. Higher food costs reduce households' disposable income and raise the cost of labour across the economy. Workers continue to leave farming before productivity rises or better jobs emerge in manufacturing or modern services. With more than 10 million young people entering the workforce each year, failing to generate opportunity in the economy's largest source of livelihoods would turn a potential demographic dividend into a widening jobs deficit and leave a generation behind.¹⁶⁶

Food insecurity and poor nutrition would remain severe. According to the UN's The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report, more than 300 million Africans are currently undernourished, and healthy diets are unaffordable for two-thirds of the continent's population. Climate shocks, conflict, volatile global prices and constrained development finance could make both substantially worse.

The goal is to make sure advancements are effectively translated to farmers to improve their livelihoods. The time is coming when Africa will feed itself, and even help feed the rest of the world.

— Dr Mercy Diebiru-Ojo, cassava seed-systems scientist, IITA; 2025 Africa Food Prize laureate; AGRA PhD sponsorship recipient

Trends: Managing pressures, seizing opportunity

Larger urban markets, new technologies and regional integration open new routes to productivity and scale, even as climate stress, pressure on land and water, tighter finance and geopolitical disruption raise the cost and risk of transformation. Africa's agrifood economy must create more value from land, water and labour, attract investment when capital is scarce and expensive, and withstand more frequent shocks.

Seizing the opportunity

Africa's rapid population growth and urbanisation create stronger conditions for transformation, including some of the market pull and population density that helped fuel Asia's transformation. New science and technology, including tools for faster breeding, AI-enabled advisory and decentralised solar solutions, can help Africa accelerate progress and overcome longstanding constraints across value chains. A less predictable global trading environment increases the strategic value of regional food systems, and the AfCFTA offers a framework for connecting surplus and deficit markets at continental scale. These opportunities will not produce gains automatically. Barriers to trade still fragment markets; artificial intelligence needs reliable local data and agricultural expertise; solar equipment requires capital and maintenance; and better varieties must reach farmers through functioning seed systems. Productivity gains must also withstand more frequent climate and market shocks while reducing pressure on land and water.

Building on today's improved input access across much of the continent, transformation strategies will need to be more demand-oriented, working backwards from end markets to identify the production, aggregation, storage, logistics, finance, processing and standards required to meet what consumers want. Improved regional trade will allow areas with surpluses to serve deficit markets across borders, creating the scale needed

for investment. Agro-industrialisation can turn urban food demand into growth in processing, equipment, logistics, energy and services, creating off-farm jobs and stronger markets.¹⁶⁷

Our food systems are moving us in the wrong direction: hunger levels are rising, undernutrition levels are at severe risk of rising, obesity is increasing, we are off track to meet climate targets & biodiversity is being squandered.

— Lawrence Haddad, Executive Director, GAIN; 2018 World Food Prize Laureate

Forces shaping Africa’s agrifood future

PRESSURES TO MANAGE			
 1. Climate and resource pressures rising	What is changing • Climate volatility: Climate change could cut cereal yields by 5 – 10% by 2050; the larger cost is volatility and risk. • Soil and water stress: About 65% of arable land is degraded, while water demand will rise more than four times faster than in any other region. • Adaptation finance gap: About USD 70bn a year may be needed for small-scale farming into the 2030s; only about 1% is met today.	Why it matters Higher risk makes returns less reliable, discourages investment and increases pressure to expand onto fragile land.	Imperative Put resilience and risk management at the forefront.
 2. Off-farm opportunity failing to materialise	What is changing • Widening jobs gap: Labour is leaving farming faster than productive jobs appear. • Weak industrial job growth: Automation and early deindustrialisation are narrowing the traditional route into productive work. • Young workforce: More than 10m young Africans enter the workforce each year; farming alone cannot absorb them.	Why it matters Without productive off-farm jobs, labour exits agriculture without raising economy-wide productivity.	Imperative Build industrial policy around agro-industrialisation.
 3. Capital becoming scarcer and costlier	What is changing • Rising cost of capital: Sovereign borrowing and debt-service costs are climbing. • Donor finance in retreat: Africa’s four largest donors, about two-thirds of aid, are cutting back. • Less dependable external investment: Chinese investment has declined, while Gulf investment is focused on securing food supply.	Why it matters The investment need is rising just as public and external finance becomes less available and more expensive.	Imperative Mobilise domestic private capital; use public finance to reduce risk.
OPPORTUNITIES TO CAPTURE			
 4. Rapidly growing population and demand	What is changing • Population growth: Africa’s population could double by 2050; food demand could grow by about 50% by 2035. • Urbanisation and shifting diets: Africa becomes majority urban in the mid-2030s, increasing demand for milled, processed and retailed food. • Rising rural density: More densely settled rural areas strengthen the incentive to intensify production.	Why it matters This home market can anchor African production and enterprise — or be captured increasingly by imports.	Imperative Invest now to serve urban food demand before imports lock in.
 5. Breakthrough technology becoming more accessible	What is changing • AI and digital advisory: Wider smartphone access could bring more customised advice to farmers. • Biotech and gene editing: Gene editing can shorten seed-trait development from 10 – 15 years to 3 – 5. • Solar energy: Lower off-grid solar costs could make irrigation, cold chains and processing viable in more places.	Why it matters These tools can lower the cost of reaching farmers with advice, improved seed, energy and infrastructure.	Imperative Deploy and adapt technology to African needs.
 6. Regional trade opening new markets	What is changing • Regional integration: AfCFTA is creating a framework to connect surplus and deficit markets at greater scale. • New buyers: Gulf markets and other commercial buyers are widening export options. • Higher-value markets: Prepared exporters can gain access as traceability and quality requirements tighten.	Why it matters Regional scale can improve food security, support larger investments and open higher-value markets.	Imperative Build regional food markets; help farmers reach higher-value buyers.

Source: AGRA@20 analysis drawing on OECD–FAO Agricultural Outlook, FAO, World Bank, AfDB and ISS African Futures.

Confronting the headwinds

The pressures facing the continent reinforce one another. Climate volatility and natural resource degradation make production less predictable, while conflict and insecurity disrupt production and trade routes. Geopolitics will continue to generate food, fertiliser and fuel price shocks. Premature deindustrialisation is depriving the continent of the mutually reinforcing relationship between agriculture and industry that powered Asia’s Green Revolutions.¹⁶⁸ As a result, labour is leaving the farm for low-productivity informal services that do little to drive economic growth. Governments also have less funding for development and social services, while development finance recedes. Together, these pressures make delay more costly and fragmented or short-lived interventions less likely to produce lasting results.

Navigating the future

Navigating these opportunities and pressures will require much greater investment and stronger political commitment. Private capital will need to finance farmers, input suppliers, aggregation, logistics, market-facing companies and infrastructure on a far greater scale, while governments and development partners continue to fund essential public goods. But capital will flow and remain invested only where leaders sustain clear, market-oriented priorities, credible rules and coordinated delivery. Transformation therefore depends on mobilising more finance and building durable coalitions among governments, producers, businesses and investors that align complementary investments and maintain consistency through shocks and political cycles.

The agenda is broadly understood. What is needed now is greater urgency, the ability to navigate a more complex environment and shifts in mindset.

“**For Africa to fully unlock its agricultural potential, it will take more than isolated efforts. Governments, the private sector, development partners and regional institutions must work together to create an ecosystem that supports sustainable agricultural growth. Policy alignment, resource mobilisation and the active participation of all stakeholders are crucial to overcoming the structural challenges we face.**

— Samaila Zubairu, President and CEO, Africa Finance Corporation¹⁶⁹

An integrated agenda: Five requirements, and what must change

Chapter 1 identified weak productive foundations, disconnected markets and political and institutional constraints that continue to hold back agrifood transformation. Chapter 2 showed that progress in one area was not enough: production, markets, finance and policy had to work together, supported by capable local institutions that could sustain delivery. Today, more frequent and severe climate and market shocks, growing and changing demand and tighter finance make transformation harder.

Together, these findings point to five interdependent requirements:

- raising farm profitability and resilience;
- linking supply and demand;
- growing markets, value and jobs;
- mobilising investment and managing risk; and
- sustaining political commitment and institutional delivery.

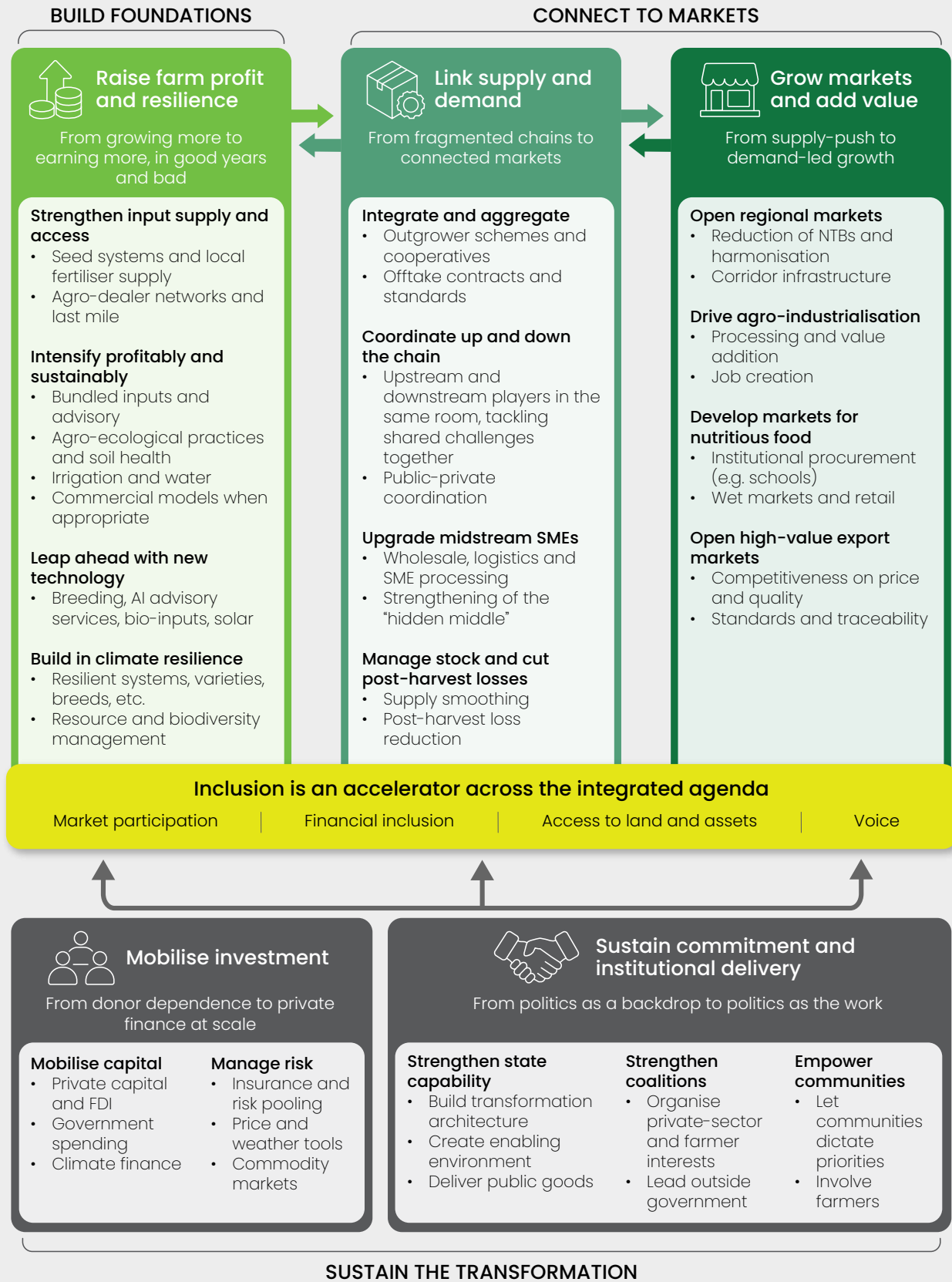
These are not new priorities; they also reflect continental commitments, including the Kampala CAADP agenda.

The five requirements must be addressed together. The first three form the economic engine: profitable and reliable agricultural production; stronger links to demand; and expanded markets and value creation that reward investment. The final two make that engine investable and durable. Weakness in any one can undermine progress in the rest.



Exhibit 33

Five requirements for transformation in one integrated agenda



1. Raise farm profitability and resilience: From growing more to earning more, in good years and bad

AGRA and its partners recorded the clearest gains where seed, soil health, extension and finance reached the same farmers. Yet higher yields did not consistently lead to higher incomes where markets and risk management remained weak, reinforcing the need to strengthen the whole chain from production to income, not yields alone.

Small farms in parts of Africa achieve only 10 to 30% of their land's potential yield, and women's yields can be up to 25% lower than men's because they have less access to land and inputs.^{170, 171} The Kampala agenda now aims to halve that gap by 2035.¹⁷² Yet improving input access alone has not delivered transformation.

For two decades, output has grown, but not efficiently or sustainably. Policymakers and agronomists have long treated yield (i.e. land or animal productivity) as a technical goal. However, higher yields have not always translated into significantly higher farmer profits and have sometimes come at the expense of resilience and sustainability. Smallholders make investment decisions in the face of unpredictable weather, uncertain prices and limited cash. Land degradation and the growing threat of climate change make a different approach to farm productivity and intensification more urgent.

Yield cannot be the only objective; farmer profitability, climate resilience and sustainability must carry equal weight. This requires seed R&D that delivers better risk-adjusted returns under real smallholder

conditions. High fertiliser costs must be addressed, including by examining how ecological practices and biofertilisers can contribute to profitability. Improved access to water and irrigation is crucial both to increasing productivity and reducing the risk of investing in other inputs. New technologies, including crop science, next-generation biologicals, AI advisory and solar irrigation, can help meet these needs, but bringing them to market in ways that meet smallholder needs requires robust regulatory frameworks, investment and commercial strategies.

Beyond addressing individual drivers of farm profitability, more work is needed to design and deliver bundles of inputs, advisory, financing and insurance that combine technologies and practices rather than promote single inputs in isolation. Otherwise, access to technology will not lead to adoption.

The objective is not lower ambition, but a higher standard for productivity: not just land and crop productivity, but also labour productivity, more reliable returns on investment and a natural resource base that can sustain future production.

2. Link supply and demand: From fragmented chains to connected markets

An AGRA survey across 15 countries found agro-processing plants operating at only 40 – 50% of capacity even while farmers struggled to find reliable buyers. The problem was not necessarily the absence of supply or demand, but the weak connection between them.

Africa's food demand is large and growing, but it does not consistently translate into dependable markets for farmers or reliable supply for processors.

AGRA has previously highlighted Africa's dynamic and essential "hidden middle": the aggregators, traders, transporters, wholesalers and small processors that move food between farms and consumers. These businesses connect farmers to markets but remain under-capitalised, lacking the working capital, information, standards and infrastructure needed to coordinate quality and volume across dispersed producers.

A forward-looking agenda must strengthen these essential SMEs and the infrastructure they depend on, while tightening links

across fragmented value chains so that farmers and downstream businesses can invest when supply and demand are more certain. Improved quality standards, contracts and traceability can help, as can outgrower arrangements and stronger farmer cooperatives that aggregate supply and align incentives between producers and offtakers.

Too few mechanisms bring seed breeders, processors and others along the value chain together to solve shared problems. Without this coordination, farmers do not receive clear signals about what buyers need, and businesses are less likely to make the investments needed across the value chain.

3. Grow markets and add value: From supply-push to demand-led growth

Rwanda's specialty coffee shows how smallholders can climb into high-value markets. A national strategy shifted the sector from commodity-grade to fully washed specialty coffee.¹⁷³ Washing stations grew from two in 2002 to about 300 by 2015, and in 2008 Rwanda became the first African country to host the Cup of Excellence, the industry's premier quality competition and auction.^{174, 175}

Farmers can only invest in higher yields or higher-value production if reliable markets can absorb the supply. Food demand could grow by nearly 50% by 2035, but many national markets remain small and disconnected, exacerbating price volatility and limiting farmers' options.¹⁷⁶

The largest opportunity lies within Africa, where domestic markets need stronger links among surplus areas, cities, processors and deficit regions, while the AfCFTA can help turn fragmented national markets into larger regional ones. Food corridors, more consistent standards, efficient border procedures and trunk infrastructure can create the scale needed to attract investment. Smallholders and agrifood firms should also be helped to enter higher-value domestic, regional and export markets through improved quality, traceability, certification and commercial

relationships. Institutional procurement and markets for nutritious foods can direct demand in ways that raise farmer incomes and improve diets.

Agro-industrialisation is another increasingly important priority for the continent, helping meet demand for products such as animal feed, dairy and packaged food. Beyond growing the economy, improved sorting, milling, slaughtering and packaging will create the market pull that rewards farmers for productivity and quality. These activities will also create dignified work in rural communities, fuelling labour productivity on and off the farm.

The Kampala agenda ties this growth to inclusion, aiming for at least 30% of women and young people to be empowered in agrifood value chains by 2035.¹⁷⁷

4. Mobilise investment and manage risk: From fragmented funding to mobilising capital at scale

Africa's annual agrifood financing gap is estimated at USD 180 billion – far beyond what public and development finance can close directly on their own.

Transformation will require more and better public investment as well as far larger flows of private capital.

Advocacy and technical support will be needed to strengthen government investment in agriculture. Government commitment has weakened in many countries, even though agriculture still needs sustained public funding for research, rural infrastructure and data. More funding matters, but so does how it is spent: investment in these areas is more likely to support transformation than poorly targeted subsidies or short-lived projects.

Declining aid flows make a faster shift towards private investment essential. Public and aid budgets cannot finance transformation at the scale required. Development finance and

philanthropy remain critical for preparing investable opportunities, co-financing public goods and reducing risk to attract larger pools of domestic and international capital. Guarantees, blended finance, insurance and better market information can help banks and investors enter unfamiliar parts of the sector. Working-capital finance can help agribusinesses buy from farmers and invest in storage, processing and logistics.

Managing risk across the value chain is also essential to spur investment. Weather and price insurance, risk pools, functioning commodity markets and predictable policy can protect investment from shocks. Inclusion must be built in from the outset so that women, young entrepreneurs and smaller firms are not left behind.



5. Sustain political commitment and institutional delivery: From commitments to institutions and coalitions that sustain delivery

Kenya's Githunguri Dairy Farmers' Co-operative Society demonstrates the power of farmer-led development. An alliance of 31 farmers grew to 27,000 members, who have built a platform that collects, processes and markets milk under its own brand.

Africa is not short of strategies, declarations or technical solutions. The harder task is turning priorities into budgets, regulation, public goods and implementation – and sustaining that effort through political transitions, fiscal pressure and shocks. This requires capable ministries and agencies with clear mandates, skilled people, reliable data, delivery systems and accountability for results. It also requires governments and development partners to organise around longer-term transformation agendas rather than fragmented projects.

Delivery and enabling policy environments are difficult to sustain when political commitment is fragile. Durable transformation depends on

coalitions of farmers, agribusinesses, investors, consumers and political leaders that see value in maintaining the agenda. Stronger stakeholder coalitions outside government can also help protect long-term investment from abrupt policy reversals and help governments understand and respond to sector needs.

Farmers can also drive transformation through producer organisations and community-owned institutions, giving them a voice in setting priorities and a stake in the value created. The Githunguri example shows how this can work across a value chain.

Transformation happens when the integrated agenda comes together

The exact needs of a geography or value chain will vary: farmers may need seed, animal-health services, water or advice; districts may need aggregation, storage, roads or processing capacity; national governments shape finance, infrastructure and policy; and regional bodies address standards, trade rules and border delays.

Whatever the needs, an integrated transformation agenda should focus on a defined place or value chain rather than try to solve every problem everywhere.

A central challenge is bringing these actors and investments together and keeping them aligned long enough to produce lasting change. Unresolved problems in one part of the chain can undermine the entire transformation.

Examples: When a link is missing, versus when the pieces come together

What happens when integration fails...



Malawi Groundnut Transformation (SAPMaRT)

Improved seed and advice raised productive potential, while aflatoxin control, farmer organisation, aggregation and storage allowed producers to meet buyer requirements. Working capital and committed offtakers made the chain commercially viable, and government extension and policy engagement anchored delivery.

Each intervention made the others more valuable, with the programme raising yields by roughly 35%.

What happens when the link is missing...



Tanzania maize

An integrated effort combined inputs, advice and aggregation around farmers, reaching approximately 8 million people.

But management of surplus stocks was problematic. In some seasons, maize prices fell by as much as 90% at harvest because storage and markets could not absorb the additional production. Supply had grown without demand growing alongside it. What looked like success in the field became a loss at the market.



Coordination for sustained delivery

Africa’s agrifood transformation depends on progress across all five areas, and many of the required shifts are already reflected in the latest CAADP strategy, national plans and donor priorities. The challenge is to turn these commitments into sustained delivery at the scale needed to change the continent’s trajectory.

Putting the necessary policies, investments and programmes in place is not enough; implementation requires strong institutions, leadership and mechanisms with the mandate and capacity to keep them aligned.

Exhibit 34 shows why this is especially demanding in Africa. In Asia and Latin America, large national or regional markets could absorb surplus, governments could expand research, irrigation and input support at scale, and growing industries absorbed workers

leaving agriculture. Africa’s transformation must span many crops and livestock systems across widely different soils, climates and markets. Markets are more fragmented, more actors must be aligned, public finances are tighter and links between agriculture and industry are weaker. Agrifood transformation in Africa therefore requires more deliberate and sustained coordination.

Orchestration is more than convening meetings or sharing information. It is the continuing work of organising around shared outcomes, ensuring leadership is in place for key needs, sequencing public and private investment, mobilising finance, resolving bottlenecks and maintaining accountability. The institution accountable for the outcome may coordinate delivery, but the two roles can sit with different actors.

Durable progress requires an institution that owns the work and has the capability to continue it after any project ends. External partners should support coordination in ways that strengthen its ability to lead over time.

Institutions require more than mandates and strategies: they need leaders and skilled people, reliable budgets and data, delivery systems, authority to work across institutional boundaries and accountability for outcomes. Agriculture, and even more so the wider agrifood system, cuts across ministries, levels of government, infrastructure, finance, private enterprise and many production systems. Delivery can easily break down when responsibilities are fragmented, coordinating bodies lack authority or resources, or external partners circumvent critical institutions.

The state remains indispensable, even when others orchestrate delivery

In many examples of sector transformation around the world, the state has played a leading role. Several African cases of strong state capacity and sustained political commitment also provide evidence for this model.

Government remains indispensable to agrifood transformation, but it does not need to lead every coordination mechanism. Top-down direction can be counterproductive where capable producer, market or investment institutions already exist. It sets policy and standards, funds public goods, regulates trade, provides infrastructure at scale and protects the public interest. Businesses, producer organisations and investment platforms may coordinate delivery, but their success still depends on predictable rules and effective public institutions.

Rwanda’s horticulture sector provides a strong example of state enablement. Over the past decade, private firms organised production and secured access to demanding overseas markets, while Rwanda’s National Agricultural Export Development Board (NAEB), a public institution, provided quality testing, certification, cold chain infrastructure and the market access needed.¹⁷⁸ NAEB did not direct the value chain, but it provided public goods and resolved bottlenecks without

which the market could not have grown. According to Rwanda’s National Agricultural Export Development Board (NAEB), horticulture exports spanning cut flowers, vegetables and fruit grew from about USD 5.8 million in 2015/16 to USD 86.2 million in 2024/25 – a nearly 15-fold increase in under a decade.^{179, 180}

The state can lead transformation directly, enable another institution to lead, or share orchestration through an explicit compact or platform. Its role should be defined from the outset. Where public institutions have the capability and political backing, they should lead. Elsewhere, government can set the rules, fund public goods and enable producer, business, investment or regional institutions to organise delivery. Strengthening state capability remains necessary in every arrangement.

Exhibit 34

Why coordination is demanding in Africa

	Common agricultural transformation conditions	Conditions in Africa
 Technology model	One or two staple technology packages	Many commodities and agro-ecologies
 Market geography	Large national markets	Small, fragmented regional markets
 Who holds the levers	Strong state leadership, e.g. in R&D, extension, irrigation, procurement	Fragmented capabilities across governments, regional bodies, funders, firms, research institutions
 Financing model	Large public programmes and directed credit	Tighter fiscal space requires more outside concessional capital
 Path to structural change	Manufacturing absorbed labour and amplified productivity gains	Processing, logistics and services within agrifood must create more of the jobs and value
Africa must coordinate locally adapted technology, markets, public goods and capital around specific outcomes. No single package, and no single institution, can carry transformation alone.		

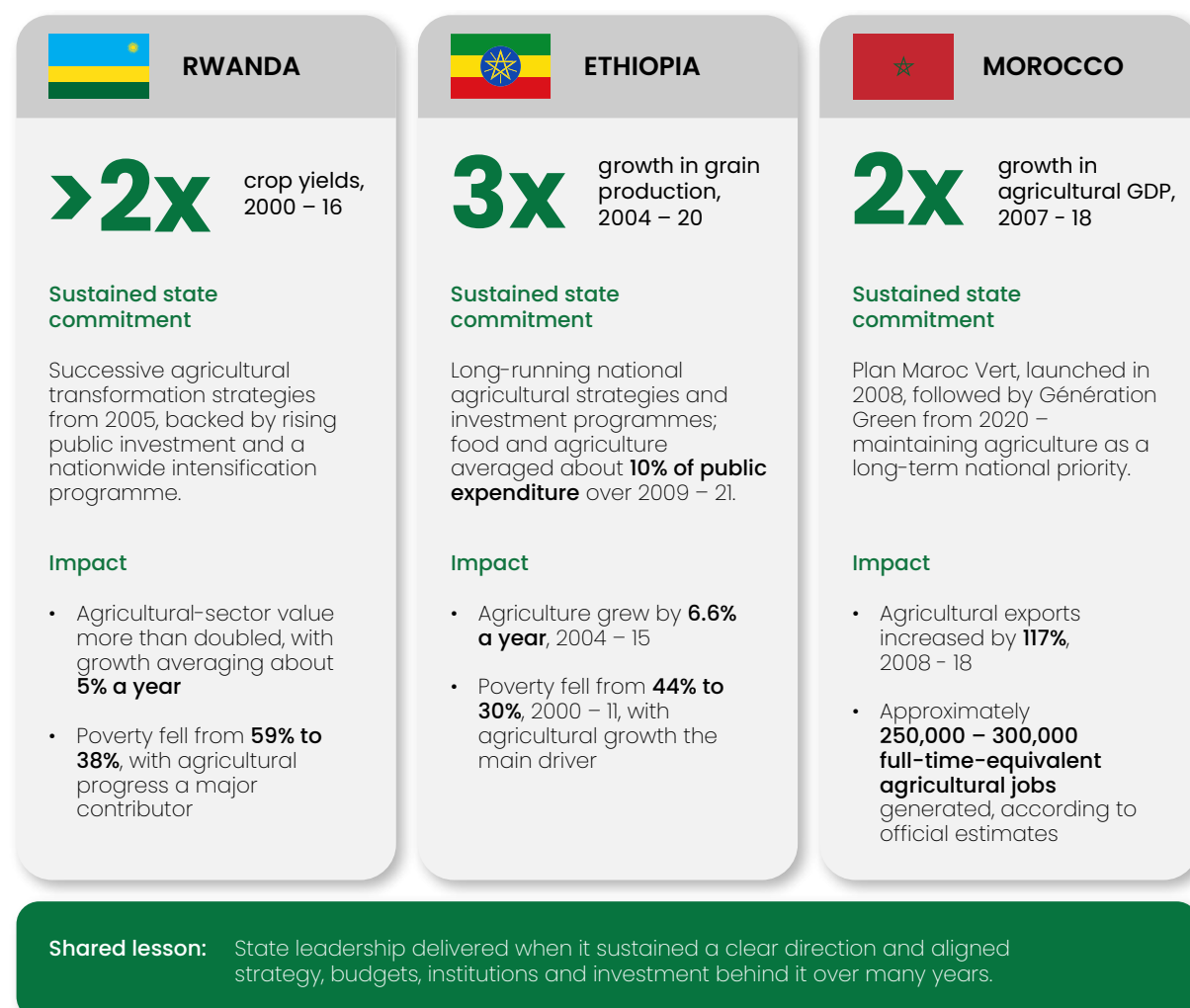
To turn agriculture into a business dictates that we modernise it, invest in technology and research, make reforms in land tenure, land and water management use and develop transportation infrastructure for greater distribution and trade.

— H.E. Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, AfDB Annual Meetings High-Level Seminar, Marrakech, 28 May 2013¹⁸¹



Exhibit 35

State-led transformation can work when direction and delivery persist over time



Mechanisms for organising and orchestrating delivery

Orchestration can take different forms depending on the goals, obstacles and institutional capabilities. Exhibit 36 presents six illustrative mechanisms, from direct state leadership to producer-led, investment-led and regional models. These are complementary ways of delivering the five requirements, not substitutes for them. A country may use several at once across different places, value chains and outcomes.

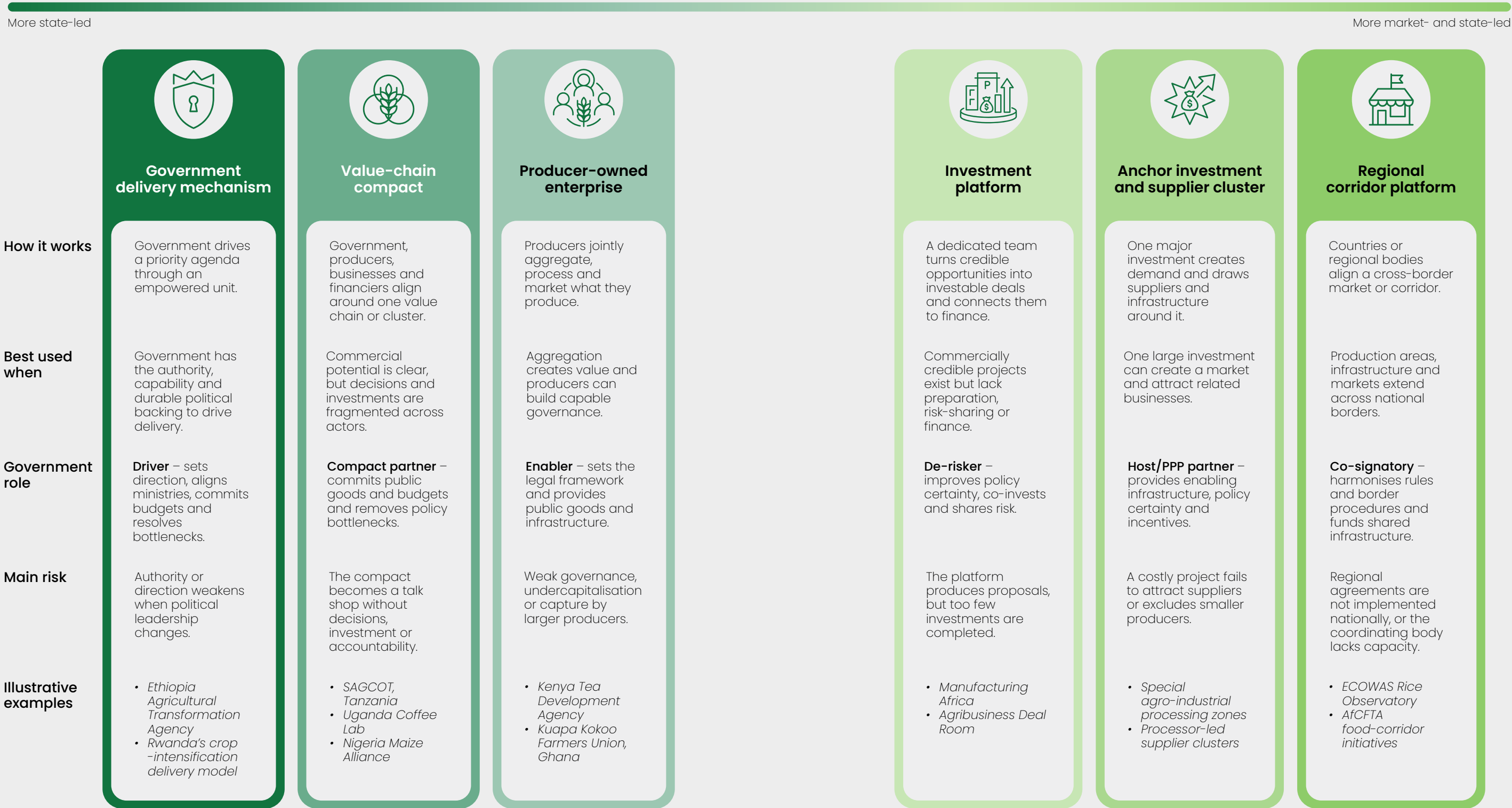
Whatever mechanism is used, it should pass five tests:

- **Authority**
Can the mechanism secure decisions, commit actors and resolve bottlenecks?
- **Focus**
Is it organised around a clear outcome, value chain, place or corridor?
- **Accountability**
Are leaders and participants answerable for delivery and outcomes?
- **Durability**
Does it sit in an institution with the mandate, people and resources to continue beyond a project?
- **Representation**
Do farmers, women, young people and smaller businesses have a meaningful role in decisions and access to the resulting opportunities?



Six example mechanisms for delivery coordination

Illustrative, not exhaustive. These are not competing models for the whole continent, a country may use several at once for different purposes.



Across all six mechanisms, responsibility for aligning actors, investment and delivery over time must be clear. Exhibit 37 places this coordinating role at the centre of transformation.

Actors and solutions often exist, but responsibility for aligning them may be unclear or sit with an institution that lacks the capacity to act. Orchestration requires more than meetings or temporary project support; it needs a clear mandate and accountability throughout delivery.

Exhibit 37

Who will fill the “empty centre”?

The actors and the solutions may all exist. Investment and progress stall when no institution is responsible for aligning and coordinating them.



A refreshed agenda, pursued differently

The broad requirements for agrifood transformation are familiar, but distinct shifts are needed to address long-standing challenges, seize new opportunities and confront growing pressures. Many are already under way, but renewed commitment is needed to accelerate progress across the continent. Without it, stalled transformation will deepen hunger and poverty rather than fuel broad-based economic and social progress.

Commitment, however, is only the starting point; even a strong agenda will not deliver itself. Across fragmented markets and institutions, responsibility for aligning investment, roles and accountability is often dispersed, and the institutions expected to lead may need greater authority, resources or support to do so effectively. The next chapter considers how AGRA might support this work, while ownership remains with African institutions, businesses, producers and communities.



CHAPTER 4

AGRA's catalytic role in Africa's agrifood transformation

This chapter sets out emerging perspectives on AGRA's future role while it continues to deliver its current strategy. Drawing on the report's findings, these reflections provide a starting point for considering how AGRA's work may evolve.

KEY MESSAGES

- 1. AGRA should use its catalytic role to drive towards impact at far greater scale.**

Africa now has many more capable public, private and civil-society actors than it did 20 years ago, but no single organisation can deliver agrifood transformation alone. AGRA can use its programmes, investments and relationships to help them mobilise finance, coordinate delivery and sustain progress at much greater scale.
- 2. AGRA's value proposition is to help African institutions turn shared transformation priorities into sustained delivery.**

It combines catalytic investment, technical and delivery expertise, country and continental reach, and evidence, policy and advocacy. It applies these strengths to diagnose whole systems, align actors and investment behind shared priorities, and institutionalise the ownership and capacity needed for progress to last – with smallholder prosperity and inclusivity as the ultimate test.
- 3. At country level, AGRA should help institutions turn priorities into sustained delivery.**

This means bringing technical support, stronger delivery capacity, private investment and coordinated action around a small set of national priorities. AGRA should engage most deeply where governments or other anchor institutions are committed to leading and sustaining the work.
- 4. AGRA will help drive regional and continental action.**

It will work with African institutions and partners on priorities that no country can advance alone, including regional trade, shared tools and multi-country initiatives. AGRA will also support CAADP and help translate regional and continental efforts into country-level delivery.
- 5. AGRA's future role will depend on deeper partnerships and shared accountability.**

AGRA will work through alliances and institutions to pursue a small number of major priorities over longer periods. These partnerships will combine mandates, expertise, delivery capacity and targeted grants around shared outcomes, with each partner's contribution clearly defined.



AGRA was founded with a catalytic intent

Chapter 3 set out an integrated agenda for agrifood transformation: raising farm profitability and resilience, connecting supply to demand, growing markets and value addition, mobilising investment, and sustaining political commitment and implementation. In order to sustain delivery and coordination around this agenda, stronger institutions and coalitions are required, as well as orchestration to align actors and investment around shared goals. This chapter explores AGRA’s potential contributions towards this in the years ahead.

AGRA was conceived as an alliance. Its purpose from the outset was to bring governments, businesses, researchers, farmers, funders and other partners together, using its resources to unlock wider action. Even when AGRA worked directly with seed companies, aggregators, buyers and financiers, it did so in only a few countries, regions and value chains. Its wider impact depended on what its partners carried forward. AGRA’s catalytic design and ambition are even more relevant today, for three reasons:

- 1. Africa’s needs are vast, while traditional sources of funding for the sector are in retreat.
- 2. Climate change, urbanisation, technological change and geopolitical pressure are making transformation more urgent and complex.
- 3. The agrifood ecosystem has matured significantly, giving AGRA greater opportunity to work with and through capable partners.

AGRA’s catalytic opportunity

The previous chapter outlined the ambitious, wide-ranging agenda needed to accelerate agrifood transformation. No single player can deliver it, but governments have critical roles in providing public goods, creating enabling environments for investment and brokering access to regional markets. Even with higher government spending, significantly more private capital will be needed to finance sustained transformation. Approximately USD 50 billion in private capital, government spending and development assistance flows into Africa’s agriculture sector each year, while the AfDB estimates the annual financing gap at a further USD 180 billion.¹⁸²

This is where AGRA’s catalytic model matters. It cannot finance or deliver transformation at scale on its own, but it can use its technical expertise and stakeholder relationships to identify investable opportunities, bring together the necessary actors and strengthen state capacity to enable and de-risk wider investment. AGRA will continue targeted

programmes and grants where technical or delivery gaps remain, while using its coordination and institutional work to increase their reach and impact.

USD 180bn

The estimated annual financing gap for Africa’s agriculture sector.

“**AGRA is a small actor, even though in some sense it is big. Its objective should be to catalyse, and to catalyse investment by others.**

— Steven Were Omamo, Director for Africa and Director for Development Strategies and Governance Unit, IFPRI

An ecosystem that has evolved and grown

When AGRA was founded, much of the institutional and commercial infrastructure needed for agrifood transformation was missing. Local seed industries were few and small, agricultural lending was limited, digital advisory did not exist, few specialist investors served agrifood businesses and continental agricultural institutions were still nascent.

The landscape has changed significantly. The list below illustrates its breadth but is far from comprehensive:

- More than 700 local seed companies produce certified seed, and agro-dealer networks reach much further into rural areas.
- Specialist delivery organisations such as TechnoServe, SNV, Farm Africa, Heifer International, Solidaridad, TradeMark Africa, Gatsby Africa, Mercy Corps and IDH, alongside African organisations such as AFAP and Kilimo Trust, work with governments, farmer organisations and businesses to strengthen value chains, build enterprises and deliver programmes at scale.
- Organisations such as One Acre Fund, Babban Gona, ThriveAgric and Farmerline combine inputs, advice, finance and market access for farmers.
- Digital Green, iSDA, Kuza, Extension Africa and other providers are expanding digital advisory.
- Specialist investors such as AgDevCo, Sahel Capital and ARAF provide capital directly to agrifood businesses.
- Aceli Africa, NIRSAL, GIRSAL and FSD Africa help financial institutions serve the sector through incentives, risk-sharing, data and new financial instruments, while IDH Farmfit uses blended finance to reduce investment risk.

- Large African and multinational companies invest across the value chain. Silverlands and Illovo Sugar operate in production and processing; Olam, ETG, Dangote and BUA invest in trading, manufacturing and processing; and OCP Group, Yara and Bayer expand access to fertiliser, seed and other agricultural inputs.
- A growing base of African traders, aggregators, processors, logistics firms and producer organisations connects farmers to domestic and regional markets.
- Commercial banks including Equity Group, NMB, CRDB, Co-operative Bank of Kenya, Ecobank and Standard Bank/Stanbic are expanding agrifood lending. Dedicated agricultural lenders, including TADB and national agricultural banks in Ghana, Nigeria, Mali and South Africa, provide specialised finance across the value chain. Pula and ACRE Africa are expanding agricultural insurance and other tools for managing risk.
- National research and regulatory institutions have also become more capable, while AUDA-NEPAD, regional economic communities and organisations such as AKADEMIYA2063 and FARA provide stronger continental research and policy capability.

AGRA and its partners helped build parts of this ecosystem, from local seed companies and agro-dealer networks to the risk-sharing facilities that first brought commercial banks into agricultural lending.

A stronger ecosystem changes where AGRA adds most value. Where capable actors now exist, AGRA can align, strengthen and scale their contributions; where critical capabilities are missing, it will continue to help build them.

Exhibit 38

How the ecosystem has evolved

Transformation levers		Around 2006	What has emerged	Implications for AGRA
BUILD	 Raise farm profitability and resilience	Weak input, advisory and farmer-finance systems	More seed firms, agro-dealers, digital and bundled-service providers	Address remaining gaps and connect providers to wider agendas
	 Link supply and demand	Thin aggregation, processing and market links	More processors, aggregators and market platforms	Help resolve shared constraints and align supply-side and demand-side investment
CONNECT	 Grow markets and add value	Small, fragmented national markets	AfCFTA, regional institutions, growing urban demand	Support regional markets, standards and corridors
	 Mobilise investment and manage risk	Few specialist lenders or investment vehicles	Agricultural banks, funds, DFIs and risk-sharing mechanisms	Improve enabling conditions and connect credible pipelines to capital
SUSTAIN	 Sustain political commitment and institutional delivery	Weak planning, regulatory and delivery institutions	National strategies, agencies and continental accountability processes	Strengthen institutions and help turn plans into sustained delivery

Amplifying the impact of AGRA’s capabilities

AGRA’s role has evolved as the sector’s needs have changed. Its early work concentrated on seeds, soils, inputs, extension, markets and finance; it later added country coordination, government capability, regional initiatives and continental stewardship. Each step added capabilities that remain valuable today.

The opportunity now is to combine them more deliberately, so that practical programmes and investments, technical and delivery expertise, evidence and policy influence, and institutional relationships reinforce one another. Stakeholders often encounter only one part of this offer; the value proposition below brings the full combination together.



AGRA's role: Catalysing sustained delivery around shared ambitions

A value proposition for catalytic impact

AGRA's country programmes have helped integrate work on farms, markets, finance and policy, while its continental work has connected country priorities to wider policy, trade and investment opportunities. Through this experience, AGRA has developed a distinctive value proposition combining four mutually reinforcing strengths: catalytic investment; technical and delivery expertise; country and continental reach; and evidence, policy and advocacy. AGRA deploys all four to help country partners drive integrated agendas and mobilise action around them. Exhibit 39 sets out the principles that should guide this work.

AGRA's experience shows how different parts of this value proposition work together. In Nigeria, AGRA combined technical diagnosis with support for the design of NIRSAL's

risk-sharing architecture; the Central Bank of Nigeria capitalised the facility at USD 500 million.¹⁸³

Under the consortia model, a USD 45 million programme investment combined catalytic funding and partner alignment to help unlock USD 660 million in wider investment. At the continental level, AGRA's technical support helped institutionalise the CAADP Biennial Review, now used by 45 member states to track delivery.¹⁸⁴

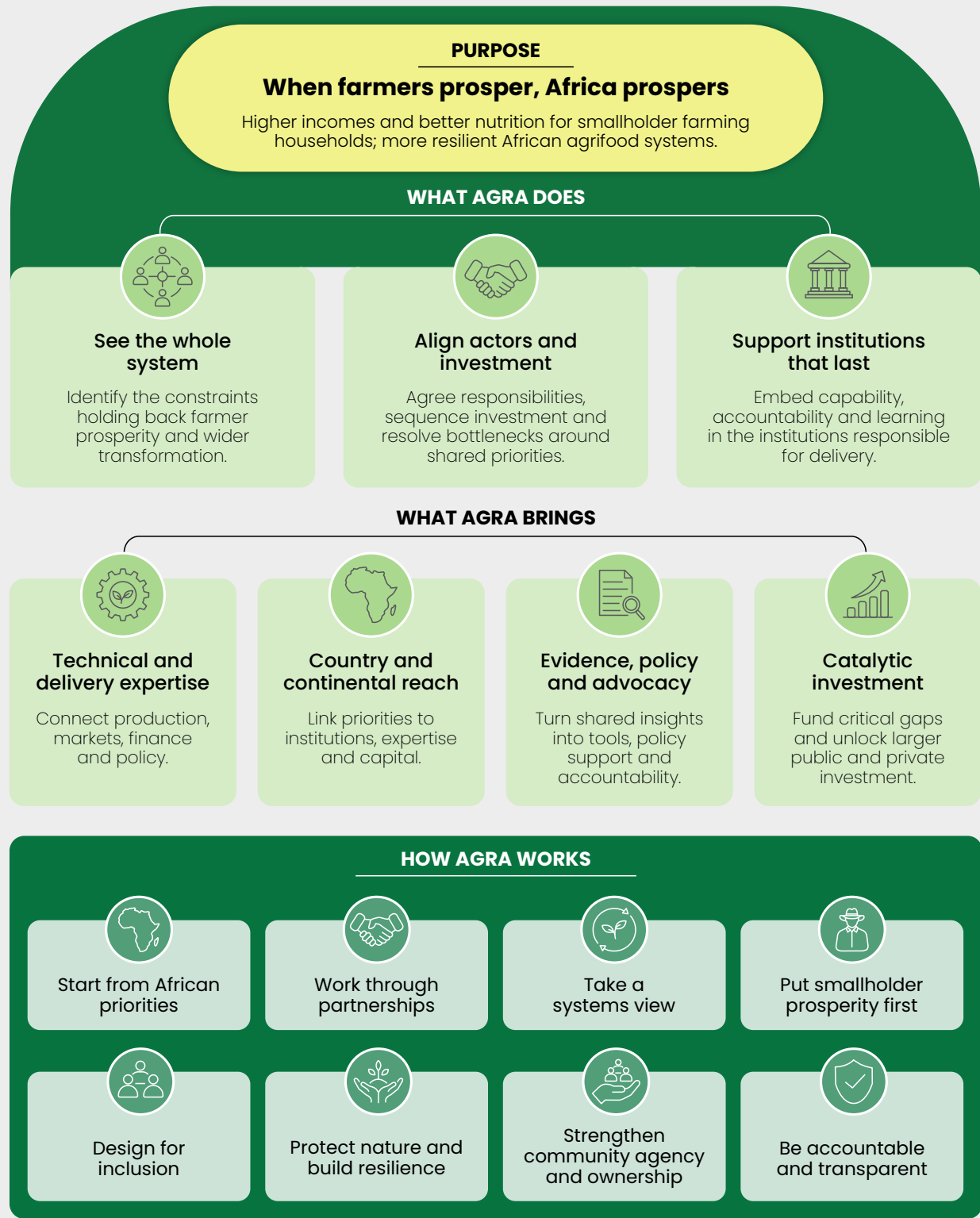
This value proposition is not a separate programme or an additional role. It is a way of applying AGRA's capabilities across its different roles, with the combination varying by problem, geography, existing capabilities and the partners able to lead.

“**AGRA's strength is its role as an African institution, working across sectors and connecting partners at both the continental and national levels. The opportunity now is to leverage those relationships to enable responsible private-sector investment and scale, creating greater economic opportunity through agriculture.**

— Obai Khalifa, Deputy Director, Agricultural Development (Africa), Gates Foundation

Exhibit 39

AGRA's value proposition



Addressing ecosystem gaps

Over the past 20 years, AGRA has played six broad roles across the agrifood sector, as shown in Exhibit 40. It helped build farm-level foundations, supported markets and finance, coordinated value chains, strengthened government capability, contributed to major continental initiatives and supported Africa's wider transformation agenda. This breadth reflected the sector's needs: in many places, essential businesses, institutions and market linkages did not exist, and progress in one area depended on progress in another.

AGRA continues to work across all six roles, but its next strategy will need to determine where its relationships, expertise and funding can help shape larger programmes and investments led by others. Targeted programme support will remain important to close critical gaps, test new approaches, reduce risk, strengthen delivery and support inclusion.

The balance across these roles will differ by country, depending on the capabilities, opportunities and partners already present. In areas such as youth employment, climate adaptation and food-loss reduction, stronger institutional ownership and links to country, regional and continental initiatives can extend programme impact and help successful approaches reach scale.

Country-led transformation: Strengthening institutions and aligning ecosystems

Transformation is delivered within countries and requires government ownership, although government need not carry it alone. AGRA will continue working with countries at different stages, adapting its role to the institutions and capabilities present. Deeper engagement will have the greatest impact where political commitment, institutional ownership and reciprocal partnerships enable wider investment and delivery.

One potential direction is to organise country partnerships around a small number of concrete outcomes, chosen with national partners and suited to the country's stage of transformation. These could centre on a priority value chain, food basket, production zone, agro-industrial cluster, trade corridor, or food-security or resilience goal. Value chains serve different national priorities: staples can strengthen food security and supply animal feed; horticulture can diversify production and create jobs; and export crops can support growth. Where work in livestock or aquaculture requires deeper expertise, AGRA can work with specialist partners. Across these partnerships, the aim would be to translate growth into dignified and fulfilling work for young people, especially young women.

Exhibit 40

Range of established and potential roles that AGRA could play

		Objectives	Potential roles
IN COUNTRIES – Strengthening institutions and aligning ecosystems	1  Unlock the recipe for on-farm transformation	Get seed, soil, finance and extension working as one system, with a focus on increasing farmer income and sustainability.	Grants and technical support to build seed systems, soil health, extension and farmer finance.
	2  Grow markets and opportunity beyond the farm	Build the demand side – regional and export markets, aggregation, processing – to give farmers a reason to invest.	Investment in aggregation, processing and market linkages connecting farmers to buyers.
	3  Orchestrate end-to-end value chain transformation	Pick priority value chains in specific countries and align all actors (public + private) around a shared transformation agenda.	Coordination mechanisms aligning public and private actors behind priority value chains.
	4  Bolster institutional capacity to deliver	Put governments in the lead – embedding advisory and helping to build durable institutions that can steward long-term agendas.	Advisory support embedded in ministries; planning and delivery systems strengthened.
ACROSS AFRICA – Continental leadership	5  Drive catalytic continental initiatives	Concentrate on a few big initiatives – private capital, trade corridors, agro-industry, resilient systems – across more countries.	Partnership in continental initiatives on trade, capital mobilisation and resilience.
	6  Champion the agrifood transformation agenda	Champion CAADP and serve as clearinghouse for ideas and solutions across a fragmented landscape.	Support to continental institutions to set, track and champion the transformation agenda.



AGRA's country role could include two linked tasks: strengthening the anchor institutions that must sustain transformation – including their ability to shape policy and deliver public goods – and aligning other actors around shared goals. Sustained coordination requires a capable institution with clear responsibility. AGRA can help connect these institutions to the finance, expertise, infrastructure and market relationships they cannot provide alone.

AGRA can support governments over longer periods to improve planning, budgeting and delivery; strengthen regulatory and technical agencies; coordinate work across ministries; and develop the leaders and systems needed to carry national priorities forward.

While AGRA will focus particularly on supporting national governments, it will also **partner with a wide range of other institutions** that may be instrumental in delivering a transformation programme. These could include local governments, parastatal agencies, producer organisations, industry bodies, universities, investment platforms or coalitions of several institutions. Farmer

organisations, with a special focus on women, young people and small enterprises, should have a meaningful role in defining priorities and tracking delivery.

Alongside supporting anchor institutions, AGRA can help **align actors around a shared outcome**, whether organised by country, region, place or value chain. Working with leaders and partner institutions, it can help establish programmes or platforms that bring government, business and philanthropy together to resolve coordination gaps, mobilise investment, share data and make the case for necessary public goods.

AGRA's role should therefore vary by context. Where an essential capability is absent, it may need to help build it or provide direct technical and grant support. Where capable institutions and specialist partners exist, AGRA can enable them to lead by connecting expertise, policy, finance and delivery. As ownership and capability deepen, AGRA should be able to step back. Success means stronger domestic institutions, functioning coalitions, sustained investment and systems that continue without AGRA at the centre.

What value chain orchestration could look like in practice:

- 1 Agreeing a shared outcome, investment plan and measures of success
- 2 Identifying the anchor institution and assigning responsibilities across government, business, financiers, producer organisations and technical partners
- 3 Sequencing public goods, technical support and private investment so that interdependent actions arrive together
- 4 Tracking commitments, resolving delivery bottlenecks and maintaining mutual accountability
- 5 Connecting a credible pipeline of projects and enterprises to appropriate finance

AGRA can support this function in different ways, depending on local needs and capabilities. It could help an anchor institution establish a coordination and delivery lab, fund a specialist partner to support a transformation office, strengthen an existing industry or producer platform, or connect an investment pipeline to a Deal Room. In each case, the goal is to build the capability of national institutions to lead and sustain the work over time.

Regional and Continental roles: Advancing transformation through regional and continental action

Regional and continental initiatives: Addressing priorities that cross borders

Some of the conditions needed for transformation cannot be created within national borders alone. Regional markets, common standards, disease and pest control, cross-border infrastructure, access to larger pools of capital, global trade arrangements and coordinated responses to climate or food-system shocks all require countries and mandated continental or regional institutions to work together. The purpose of AGRA's regional and continental role should be to help address these shared constraints in ways that produce practical value for countries.

At the regional and continental level, the learning points to a potential role for AGRA in a few ambitious initiatives. These initiatives should meet four conditions: (i) the constraint is genuinely cross-border; (ii) countries and a mandated regional or continental institution have ownership; (iii) capable partners can lead the specialist work; and (iv) AGRA brings a distinctive contribution through its country relationships, agrifood expertise, convening role or catalytic resources. The areas below illustrate opportunities that could meet these tests:

- **Regional markets and food corridors:**

Connecting production areas to larger markets by addressing standards, border procedures, trade policy, infrastructure and logistics together and by scaling storage, aggregation and food-loss reduction.

- **Public and private capital mobilisation:**

Advocating for investment in public goods and helping governments de-risk commercial capital or advance credible investment pipelines.

- **Job creation through agro-industrialisation:**

Addressing constraints to scaling value addition and helping to link farmers and SMEs to processors, agro-industrial clusters and growing markets, with a deliberate aim of translating growth into dignified and fulfilling work for young people, especially young women.

- **Sustainability and resilience:**

Building coalitions and partnerships to advance nature-positive agendas that protect the continent's natural resource base while improving the fertility of farmers' soils and pastoralists' common rangelands.

- **Crisis response:**

Mobilising African institutions and leaders to develop action plans, commit resources and act with urgency when global shocks and local crises threaten to undo progress.

In all these areas, credible and capable partners are already well positioned to lead, including trade specialists such as the AfCFTA Secretariat and TradeMark Africa; development finance institutions such as AfDB, IFC and AFC; and research centres such as NARIs, SROs, FARA and CGIAR centres. Nevertheless, ecosystem needs and AGRA's emerging track record point to critical roles for AGRA: connecting partners to country governments, coordinating across stakeholders and bringing agrifood expertise.

Example initiative: Regional markets and food corridors

Food corridors illustrate this model. Africa has food-surplus and food-deficit regions, yet it is often easier and cheaper to import food from outside the continent than to move it between

neighbouring countries. Different standards, unpredictable border procedures, export restrictions, poor transport links, limited storage and weak market information all raise the cost and risk of regional trade.

The AfCFTA Agri-Food Trade Action Plan provides the political framework for more connected agricultural markets. Implementation, however, must link this regional agreement to country-level changes in standards, border procedures, trade policy, infrastructure, storage and investment. AGRA can support the mandated regional institutions and participating governments to organise this work around specific corridors and value chains, while businesses, regulators and logistics providers deliver the individual components.

The ECOWAS Rice Observatory shows the shape this can take. AGRA supports it through secretariat staffing, institutional support to country chapters, and strategy and capacity building. The platform brings countries and regional actors together around a shared rice agenda, helping align production, policy, investment and trade. Similar arrangements could support other corridors and value chains where regional demand offers a substantial market for African producers.

Turning continental commitments into country delivery

The African Union, AUDA-NEPAD, regional economic communities and other African institutions have the mandate to set and steward continental and regional agendas. AGRA's role is to strengthen and support these institutions, not substitute for them: helping translate commitments into country plans, investment and delivery; linking continental priorities to national implementation; and

bringing country experience back into continental review and adaptation. AGRA has already supported CAADP implementation, including the Biennial Review, and is supporting the roll-out of the Kampala CAADP Strategy and Action Plan (2026–2035).

Sharing learnings, models and tools

Another way AGRA can advance agrifood transformation is by becoming a clearing house for ideas, evidence and tools that countries, regions and value chains can use. African governments, businesses, research bodies, producer organisations and development partners have accumulated substantial experience, but the means to find, assess and adapt approaches from elsewhere remain limited. AGRA can share lessons from its country work, identify credible models, document what made them work and help institutions adapt them. It can also develop practical tools for use across the continent, as it has done with SeedSAT and ClimVAT.

Country and continental roles should work in tandem

AGRA's country and continental roles should reinforce and enable each other. Deep country partnerships can become "lighthouses", generating practical evidence, stronger institutions, investable opportunities and models that other countries can adapt. Continental action can then bring value back to those partnerships through larger markets, more consistent standards, political backing, specialist expertise, capital and peer learning. AGRA should use country experience to shape continental action and test whether continental platforms produce tangible benefits in participating countries.



What the learning could imply for AGRA's ways of working

Potential evolutions in AGRA's ways of working

As AGRA's partnerships deepen at country and continental levels, its ways of working will also evolve. Each of the four ways of working below extends practices AGRA has already tested. Together, they would help frame a portfolio built around stronger alliances with governments, donors and ecosystem partners, for the benefit of farmers and the communities and markets in which they can thrive.

Four potential shifts merit consideration:

1. Work through alliances and institutions.

Transformation is delivered by coalitions that bring governments, businesses, farmer organisations, financiers and technical partners behind shared goals. AGRA can help build these alliances and support the orchestration needed to make them effective: agreeing who does what, building capability, tracking commitments, clearing obstacles, measuring impact and learning. From the start of each engagement, a catalytic approach would identify which African institution should own the work and how it can be strengthened so the work continues beyond AGRA's involvement.

2. Go deeper on selected priorities, for longer.

AGRA's future strategy could concentrate more attention, expertise and resources on larger, longer-term partnerships and sustain engagement until progress becomes self-supporting. In countries, this could mean supporting an integrated transformation agenda in which value chains, institutions and investment move together, rather than fragmented, short-term projects. AGRA's contribution could then evolve as partner capability grows and financing is unlocked.

3. Lead with expertise and tools, with grants serving as a strategic instrument.

AGRA's technical depth across seeds, soils, extension, markets, finance, policy, resilience and inclusion remains the foundation of its credibility. Its own experts will lead engagement with governments and partners. A catalytic approach would use grants and direct technical support more strategically to strengthen institutions, test approaches, prepare investments and close critical gaps that others cannot yet fill.

4. Shared accountability for lasting, system-level results.

AGRA can judge success by whether the wider system works better: stronger institutions, implemented policies, growing investment, improved markets and benefits for farmers and businesses, with women, young people and smaller enterprises holding a meaningful voice and share in the opportunities created. No single actor can deliver these results alone. AGRA would therefore need to be clear about the contribution for which it is accountable, how that contribution will be measured and whether that contribution continues to create value after AGRA's direct involvement ends.

Deeper and reciprocal partnerships will be central to all four. AGRA can bring longer-term commitment, technical breadth, trusted relationships, coalition-building capability and catalytic resources; partners bring mandates, political commitment, legitimacy, specialised expertise, capital, operational capability and delivery authority.

Exhibit 41

How AGRA can partner

	AGRA BRINGS	PARTNERS BRING
 Governments and Public Institutions	• End-to-end support — from diagnosis through implementation • Coordination — aligns public and private actors, builds investment pipelines	• Political commitment — sustained, with empowered counterparts • Aligned budgets and policy
 Farmers and Their Organisations	• A seat at the table — helps farmers define priorities and shape delivery • Investment — in stronger producer organisations, market and finance links	• Credible representation of members • Consistent participation
 Businesses and Investors	• Connections — across governments, producers and funders • A stronger enabling environment — resolves shared constraints, connects finance	• Leaders with a shared-gain mindset — willing to put sector-wide opportunity first
 Donors and Development Partners	• Deep trust with governments • Alignment — across divergent donor strategies	• Longer time horizons • Commitment to institution-building — not just short-term outputs
 Continental and Regional Institutions	• Advocacy and technical partnership — bridging to country implementation • Reinforcement — of CAADP-mandated institutions, not new platforms	• Platforms and partnerships to support country-level programmes
AGRA brings: - partnership mindset - long-term engagement - technical breadth - trusted relationships - coalition-building - catalytic resources AGRA recedes as institutions, markets and partnerships learn to perform on their own.		

A renewed Alliance

AGRA was founded on a simple belief: Africa’s agricultural transformation is possible, and no single actor can achieve it alone. Twenty years of experience have only strengthened that conviction. The foundations are stronger, and more African institutions, businesses and organisations are equipped to lead. Yet the continent’s agrifood transformation remains unfinished.

This is an opportunity to reinvigorate the ‘Alliance’ in AGRA’s original name. That alliance encompasses governments, farmers, private-sector operators, investors and development partners. At this critical moment for the continent, AGRA can help forge and strengthen the coalitions among these partners needed to deliver transformation agendas.

AGRA’s first 20 years helped rebuild foundations and put many of the pieces in place for agrifood system transformation. Over the next two decades, those pieces must work together at a scale that raises farmer incomes, creates dignified jobs and improves nutrition and resilience. Africa’s agrifood systems must become engines of shared prosperity. AGRA’s contribution will be greatest when the changes it helps set in motion grow and last far beyond AGRA itself. That is the promise of a reinvigorated Alliance.

“
A stronger AGRA is a big win for all of us and others who care about agriculture in Africa.

— Dr Appolinaire Djikeng, Director General, ILRI

Appendix: AGRA’s donors

We appreciate the investment made by partners over the past 20 years, and the contribution to transforming agriculture and food systems.

Each partnership brought more than capital. It brought belief in the possibility of an Africa that feeds itself. Together, we have built resilience where there was fragility, and opportunity where there was scarcity. This milestone belongs as much to you as it does to the farmers and communities you chose to stand behind. As we look to the next chapter, we carry forward the trust you placed in this work.

- African Development Bank (AfDB)
- AGRF Forums Partners
- Agri Experience
- American National Standards Institute, Inc. (ANSI)
- AusAID
- BMZ/KfW
- Central Bank of Nigeria
- CIMMYT
- Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DANIDA)
- Econet Wireless Global
- EU
- Everette O’Connor Charitable Trust
- FCDO
- Gates Foundation
- GCF
- Government of Finland
- Government of Sweden – Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- IDRC
- IFAD
- IFDC
- IITA

- IKEA Foundation
- International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)
- Jeff Raikes Foundation
- Microsoft
- Millennium Development Authority (MiDA)
- Ministry of Development Cooperation – Luxembourg
- National Treasury of Kenya/IFAD
- Network for Good Donation
- New Venture Fund (NVF)
- Norwegian MFA
- Partners for Seed In Africa (PASA)
- Quality Food Products Ltd (QFP)
- Rural Development Administration of Korea (KAFACI – RDA)
- SIDA
- SNV Netherlands
- Technical Centre for Agricultural & Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA)
- The Department for International Development (DFID)
- The Embassy of the Kingdom of The Netherlands (NL)
- The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)
- The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT)
- The Mastercard Foundation
- The Rockefeller Foundation
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- USAID
- Visa Foundation
- World Bank
- World Resources Institute (WRI)
- Yara International ASA

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This report is dedicated to Africa's smallholder farmers and to every agripreneur and small and medium enterprise working in the agrifood ecosystem. African governments and the continental and regional bodies have given the buy-in and support that make our service to farmers and enterprises possible. Our resource, programme and implementing partners continue to strengthen the capacity of the sector through their sustained commitment.

To all who contributed their time and expertise, our thanks, with apologies for any inadvertent omissions.

Alice Ruhweza
President, AGRA

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Impact, Learning and Foresight Report 163

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