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THE STATE OF AFRICAN AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

Harnessing Innovation and Partnerships to Achieve CAADP-Kampala Targets

Keynote Address

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Your Excellencies. Distinguished delegates.

My task this morning is to take stock of the state of our Agrifood Systems, as well as the innovations and partnerships we are harnessing to achieve the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP)-Kampala targets.

Even as we share today milestones recorded over the previous two decades of CAADP, it is important to note that the Kampala phase of CAADP did not emerge without context.

A river that forgets its source will dry up. This morning, I wish to share with you a perspective of where we have come from and where we stand today, and what these portend for our journey ahead into the Kampala Declaration: six commitments, twenty-two targets, forty-eight intervention areas, to be achieved by 2035.

From Maputo to Malabo: What the First Two Decades Taught Us

The 2003 Maputo Declaration placed agriculture at the highest levels of decision-making on the continent. It gave us two aspirational targets that set the measure of our ambition: allocating 10 percent of national budgets to agriculture and targeting 6 percent annual agricultural growth.

Maputo's most important innovation was not the targets. It was the machinery built around them: evidence-based country stocktaking, inclusive national roundtables, signed CAADP Compacts, and costed National Agriculture Investment Plans. Also, within this first decade of CAADP, the creation of the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (ReSAKSS) gave us something rare at the time: an independent public evidence base against which progress could be checked.

And it worked. The Maputo decade helped to restore agricultural growth after the stagnation of the 1980s and 1990s. Africa registered the highest growth in agricultural value added of any world region from 2000 onward. Intra-African agricultural exports grew from 5.5 billion dollars in 2003 to 19.7 billion by 2024.

But Maputo also revealed the recurring weakness of our system. Government agriculture expenditure averaged roughly 3.1 percent of total public spending - far below the 10 percent pledge. We proved that we could restore agricultural growth even if not yet at the ambition we had set for ourselves.

Eleven years later, from 2014, Malabo widened the frame. It retained the Maputo targets, and added food security, poverty reduction, intra-African trade, resilience, and mutual accountability.

Malabo's biggest innovation was the Biennial Review: a continental self-assessment carried out every two years, scored against a rising benchmark, published as the Africa Agriculture Transformation Scorecard, and reported to the AU Assembly by Heads of State themselves. Until today, nothing comparable exists for any other sector of African development policy.

Over the decade of five review cycles within Malabo, the verdict is sobering. In the fifth and final Malabo review, the continent scored 5.25 against a benchmark of 9.40. Of 45 reporting Member States, none achieved the overall target. Progress was made, but it has been uneven.

Agricultural value added grew at roughly 3.5 percent a year against the 6 percent target. Government agriculture expenditure fell to about 2.5 percent of total public spending - a quarter of the commitment, and lower than under Maputo.

Our best commitment score - 8.04 - was for recommitting to the CAADP process itself. Our worst - 2.97 - was resilience to climate variability. In other words, we are better at recommitting than delivering. And we are most vulnerable precisely where the coming decade will test us hardest.

Yet Malabo gave us something invaluable. It made our accountability deficits visible. It also made our data deficits visible. In the fourth cycle, roughly 40 percent of the data required to assess the poverty commitment was missing at the continental level. **The regions that reported the least also scored the worst. Data deficiency and development deficit appear to travel together.**

So, I would summarize the first two decades this way: Maputo proved that continental commitment could restore momentum. Malabo proved that continental accountability could reveal the truth. Kampala must now prove that Africa can convert momentum and truth into transformation.

The State of the System Today

So where do we stand in July 2026, in the first year of the Kampala decade? Allow me to provide an honest assessment in four areas.

First: we are under-investing in innovation systems and capabilities.

Here is the paradox. Public agricultural R&D spending in Africa doubled between 2000 and 2020. Yet research intensity fell from 0.52 percent to 0.38 percent of agricultural GDP. Forty-one of the forty-six countries measured remain below the African Union's one percent target. We are spending more and committing less.

That is why the new Agricultural R&D System Capacity Index (ARDSCI) matters. It asks not only how much is spent but also whether national research systems have the human resources, expenditure per researcher, intensity growth, and scientific output needed to perform. Starting in 2027, ARDSCI will enter the Biennial Review as a formal accountability measure.

Second: the productivity problem is not what we usually say it is.

Africa's agricultural production is increasing, but productivity is not increasing fast enough. Unlike Asia and Latin America, our growth has come overwhelmingly from bringing more land into cultivation, not from producing more per hectare.

The yield gaps remain enormous, ranging from 40 to 60 percent for major cereals. But the reason is not simply a shortage of technologies. The technologies exist. Farmers are prevented from using them by high transaction costs, limited market access, weak extension services, inadequate infrastructure, and an enabling environment that is still too thin.

Look at total factor productivity. Eighty percent of Africa's estimated TFP gains come from improvements in technical efficiency - farmers moving closer to a frontier they already know. Only 20 percent comes from genuine technological progress - from pushing the frontier outward.

Most of what we call growth is closing the distance between current practice and best practice. That matters. But it is not enough. We are borrowing from a future we are not yet building.

Third: the technologies exist. The adoption does not.

The Untapped Potential Index shows a pattern across the continent: substantial readiness for AI and geospatial technologies, an urgent need, and dramatically low effective adoption.

In 2024, only 1.6 percent of global agri-tech investment reached Africa. Of more than 650 digital agriculture solutions operating on the continent, only 27 have crossed one million users. Yet where digital tools are used, 76 percent of studies find increased adoption of good practices, and 68 percent find higher yields. The tools work. They are simply not reaching Africans at scale.

The same pattern holds for conventional technologies. Sixty percent of our cultivated land is still worked by hand, and barely 10 percent of farm power is mechanized. Africa has 1.3 tractors per thousand hectares, compared with nearly 15 in Asia. Only 6 percent of Africa's arable land is irrigated, compared with 14 percent in Latin America and 37 percent in Asia. More than half of the fresh fruits and vegetables produced in sub-Saharan Africa are lost or wasted, with nearly half of that loss occurring during post-harvest handling and processing.

None of this is unavoidable. They are consequences of policy and institutional failure, and therefore solvable.

Fourth: trade is our clearest success and our clearest exposure.

The good news is real. Intra-African agricultural trade more than tripled between 2003 and 2023 and held firm through the 2008 financial crisis and COVID-19.

But Africa has run a persistent agricultural trade deficit since 2006. In 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the continent's agricultural import bill reached an unprecedented 122.9 billion dollars. Intra-African trade remains below 20 percent of our total agricultural trade, while Asia's intra-regional share exceeds 50 percent. Rice alone accounts for a quarter of our cereal trade deficit.

And the barriers are often hidden in plain sight. Sanitary and phytosanitary measures have a trade effect equivalent to a 49 percent tariff. Compliance costs consume, on average, 7.65 percent of firm sales in Africa South of the Sahara, compared with 1.79 percent in South Asia. **Food safety has quietly become one of the highest taxes on African trade.**

The modeling is clear: a fully enforceable AfCFTA could raise intra-African agricultural trade by more than 29 percent. But that will not happen by signing protocols alone. It will happen only if we accelerate the free movement of Africans across political borders on the continent and lower the real costs of moving safe, healthy, and nutritious food across borders.

We have proven capacity to grow, demonstrated resilience in regional trade, and an enormous unexploited technology frontier.

We need our visionaries and people of vision to step up and devise the means and mechanisms to take these learnings to scale.

What Kampala Demands

We are seven months into the implementation of the Kampala phase of CAADP. Over the next decade, we have committed to increasing agrifood output by 45 percent; cutting post-harvest losses by half; tripling intra-African agrifood trade; raising locally processed food to 35 percent of agrifood GDP; mobilizing 100 billion dollars in public and private investment; halving extreme poverty; and ensuring that 60 percent of Africans can afford a healthy diet.

Commitment One focuses on CAADP processes and values: deepening national and local-level ownership and delivery of the Declaration and developing compliant National Agrifood Systems Investment Plans (NASIPs) with full integration required by 2028.

Commitment Two is about finance. The 10 percent national budget target is retained, and a new target is added: 15 percent of agricultural GDP reinvested within the sector. That is a structural shift from today's baseline of 2.5 percent public expenditure.

Commitment Three - ending hunger - carries 26 of the 48 intervention areas. That tells us where the moral weight of this Declaration sits. The need is stark: 845 million Africans, 58 percent of us, are moderately or severely food insecure; and 62 percent of preschool-aged children are deficient in iron, zinc, or vitamin A.

Commitment Four - halving poverty - runs through employment. Agrifood systems remain Africa's largest employer, accounting for 63 percent of total employment, while 72 million young Africans are not in employment, education, or training. The jobs agenda and the agrifood agenda are the same.

Commitment Five - intra-African trade - runs through the AfCFTA, the Regional Economic Communities, and the SPS and the non-tariff barriers I have just described.

Commitment Six - resilience - is where the distance between commitment and delivery is widest. We scored 2.97 out of 10.

Kampala brings new strengths. It is the first CAADP phase with a Theory of Change and Results Framework from the outset. It arrives as an integrated policy package: Declaration, ten-year Strategy, and Action Plan. It places the Agricultural R&D System Capacity Index within the accountability framework. And it requires the Biennial Review to be incorporated into Joint Sector Review platforms, so accountability happens where money is actually discussed.

Kampala is itself a product of partnership. Thirteen Technical Working Groups. Fifty-three independent memoranda from interest groups across the continent. And the active input of hundreds of experts from across the continent contributed to its development.

Harnessing Innovation: What the Evidence Validates

So, we have the political mandate from the highest levels of government. What lessons can we glean from the last two decades, from countries that made significant progress?

First: we must integrate food systems transformation into long-term national visions. Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plans, Rwanda's strategic plans for agricultural transformation, and Morocco's Plan Maroc Vert, for example, all embedded agricultural transformation in national development architectures that outlast a single political cycle.

Second: we must elevate African research capacity. The one percent R&D benchmark is a floor, not a ceiling. And it must be paired with the institutional depth that makes spending matter - the very thing the Agricultural R&D System Capacity Index is designed to measure.

Third: we must innovate in policy and technology alike. Let me give an example. Black soldier fly farming can convert municipal biowaste into protein feed and organic fertilizer. Africa generates 99 million metric tons of suitable biowaste each year. Fully developed, the industry could, according to researchers, contribute 211 billion dollars annually, create 17 million full-time jobs, lift 22 million people out of poverty each year, and replace three-quarters of Africa's soybean feed supply. **From waste.** That is what a frontier looks like when the institutions behind it work.

Fourth: we must coordinate across government, sectors, and stakeholders. Food systems transformation also requires finance, health, infrastructure, education, energy, the environment, and trade. It is inter-ministerial, and where coordination is absent, progress does not scale.

Fifth: we must optimize conditions for sustainable growth. Smart regulation - of water use, machinery quality, digital data, seed systems, livestock biosecurity, and food safety - can accelerate transformation as powerfully as investment. Regulation is not a technocratic luxury. It is the guardrail and paving that enables private investment.

Sixth: we must stimulate infrastructure investment holistically. Irrigation without roads does not move surplus. Energy without skills does not power processing. Digital tools without connectivity do not reach farmers. The evidence on irrigation is clear: bundled systems - solar pumps with drip lines and digital decision tools - outperform single technologies.

The returns on getting this right are extraordinary. The cost of undernutrition to African economies averages 11 percent of GDP annually; every dollar invested in nutrition returns sixteen.

But here is the harder truth about innovation. Africa's policy challenges, to a considerable extent, are knowledge challenges. Not because research is absent - there is extraordinary science across this continent. The challenge is in the pipeline that connects research to policy, policy to implementation and investment, and from implementation and investment to accountability.

[Kenya's Kampala diagnostic](#), for example, is instructive. Infrastructure and subsidies absorb roughly 70 percent of public agricultural expenditure. Research and extension - among the interventions with the highest modeled returns - receive 17 percent. Under business as usual, Kenya misses most Kampala targets. Under optimal reallocation, it meets most of them. Same budget envelope. Different knowledge.

That is why the next decade cannot be about more strategies alone. It must be about implementing them, measuring them, learning from them, and correcting course fast.

Know-How and the Capable State

There is a Yoruba proverb: *Ogbón ju agbára ló* - wisdom is greater than strength.

If you will permit me a sporting analogy, consider football. The semi-finalists at this year's World Cup were the top 4 ranked teams. That is not a coincidence. Year after year, most of the same countries and clubs tend to appear in the later stages of competitions. It is because they have accumulated know-how: systems of coaching, talent development, analysis, adaptation, and execution built over decades. A coach, Jose Mourinho, famously called this 'Football Heritage.' Perhaps we should pause to ask ourselves: what is our Agriculture Heritage, and how can we build this up?

Champions are seldom overnight successes. Consider Spain, the winner of this year's World Cup. A team that played eight matches, scored fourteen goals, and conceded only one throughout the tournament. Such dominance looks effortless on the day, but it is actually the visible outcome of thousands of invisible decisions, habits, and capabilities accumulated over time and now embedded deeply in the brains of any player who proudly pulls on the jersey for the national team. Success appears sudden only to those who did not watch the years of preparation that preceded it.

The analogy matters because, in football, the objective is ultimately simple: score more goals than the opposition. Goals can come in many ways. They may emerge from fifty consecutive passes, a rapid counterattack, a set piece, or even an own goal forced by pressure. They all count the same.

Strategy, however, determines how consistently a team creates opportunities to score. The modern game demands technical mastery, discipline, teamwork, situational awareness, and constant adaptation to changing circumstances and externalities. The best teams adjust to the weather, the crowd, injuries, and the tactics of their opponents while remaining focused on the objective.

During the Kampala decade, each country will reach those goals through different pathways, just as football teams score through different styles of play. But in the end, only results count. The question is not whether we can produce a beautiful strategy document; it is whether we can consistently put points on the board and score the goals that matter: higher productivity, lower poverty, better nutrition, greater resilience, stronger trade, and shared prosperity. Thankfully, unlike football, agriculture and food are not a zero-sum, winner-takes-all proposition. We can all win by deploying diverse yet complementary strategies.

Two acquisitions will decide whether Kampala succeeds.

The first is know-how in our agribusinesses. A tractor imported is not mechanization mastered, nor the capabilities owned. A cold room purchased is not a cold chain built. A digital platform launched is not adoption achieved.

Productive knowledge is accumulated through practice: how to meet SPS standards, run a cold chain, formulate feed, manage an outgrower scheme, maintain machinery, manufacture the machine, build autonomous machines, and build artificial intelligence tools and platforms. If African agribusiness is to move up the value chain, capability must be treated as deliberate industrial policy, not as a by-product of investment.

The second is capability in public institutions. Every Kampala commitment eventually lands on the desk of a ministry, an agency, or a local government. Yet we often hand these institutions ambitious mandates without the tools to execute them.

To deliver CAADP this decade, public institutions must master planning, public finance, procurement, coordination, data, accountability, and last-mile delivery.

Consider school feeding. On paper, it is a nutrition program. In practice, it is one of the most demanding stress tests of state capability. A government that feeds millions of children daily must maintain predictable public finance, procure from thousands of smallholders, coordinate across education, agriculture, health, and finance, move food along the last mile, and track results well enough to correct course.

Those are precisely the muscles that agricultural transformation requires. Countries that scale home-grown school feeding are not only feeding children. They are practicing capable government.

So let us measure ourselves in this decade not only by what we commit to, but by what we become able to do. Fund the acquisition of know-how. Invest in the capabilities of institutions. Use programs like school feeding as both proof and a training ground.

In 2026, Africa has better data about its agricultural systems than at any point in its history. Kampala is the most specific set of agrifood commitments the continent has ever made. And for the first time, a new agenda begins with its predecessor's final scorecard already on the table.

What we lack is not knowledge. What we lack is the institutional courage to close the gap between what we know and what we do.

Africa does not suffer from a shortage of ideas. It does not suffer from a shortage of technologies. Nor does it suffer from a shortage of commitments.

The recipes exist. The evidence exists. The technologies exist. The partnerships exist. The question before us is whether we will finally build the institutions capable of turning them into results and enabling these institutions to see implementation through in an environment full of noise and distraction.

In his magnum opus, *Things Fall Apart*, the great philosopher and good ancestor Chinua Achebe wrote: "Those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble." I make this plea to all African member states as we seek to bear one another on the road to shared prosperity. Share lessons from what you are learning and pause to learn from others. Natural endowments can only go so far. To create a prosperous Africa, we need to equip capable States and invest in innovative entrepreneurship.

With humility, let us revive the true spirit of Ubuntu. Let us harken to our shared destiny. Let us redouble our efforts so that, come 2035 - and indeed, come 2063 - we can boldly proclaim that, as a community of stakeholders focused on creating the Africa we want, we achieved success.

Thank you.