



# Strengthening Agri-food Systems as a Strategic Pillar of the Africa-Europe Partnership

AU-EU Policy and Action Brief

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African and European Ministers of Agriculture convening in June 2025 have the opportunity to bring into focus the central role played by agri-food systems on both continents. Africa and Europe would do well to consider their collective advantage and interdependence in the current uncertain circumstances and identify ways to collaborate on agri-food systems, the climate-trade-development nexus, nutrition and health, and other security issues where their interests align.

## Powerful trends shaping Africa-Europe cooperation on agri-food systems

**Looking forward, the agri-food sector faces big challenges**, with an additional billion Africans by 2050. Undernutrition will burden those Africans still living with extreme poverty, while rising obesity trends imply costly health impacts on both continents. Food systems must deliver more rural development, and more dietary diversity; all at a time when farm productivity is threatened by climate change, water scarcity and soil degradation.

**Where will a billion young Africans find work?** By 2040, there will be 2 million new working age Africans each month (needing the equivalent of 360 million new jobs over the next 15 years). This generation is more dynamic, connected, ambitious, educated, and entrepreneurial than any before. Rural jobs are needed. As they seek to unlock economic opportunities wherever they can find them, policymakers in Africa and Europe will themselves come under pressure, and must wrangle with the vibrant complexity of rural-urban and regional migration on an unparalleled scale. Migration issues are closely intertwined with agri-food systems transformation and must be part of the debate.

**Will Africa capture the massive demand growth from its urban consumers?** Over the next decade, Africa's agri-food economy is projected to quadruple to over \$1trillion, which represents a vast economic opportunity for value addition, regional, and international trade. Urban consumers seek increasingly sophisticated, processed products, not the raw produce mostly delivered to market by smallholders. If Africa grows and strengthens its processing sector, together with better transport and storage infrastructure, then its smallholders and rural economies could benefit hugely from this growth in urban demand.

## Quick wins to steer the Africa-Europe Agri-food Partnership

To build more resilient agri-food systems, substantial increases in shared EU-Africa expertise are necessary, from both private and public sectors, along with associated policy and funding decisions. Emphasis on addressing the African import bill and improving diversity in diets is an imperative. There is also a major opportunity to focus more on local food products to further enhance food security and economic stability. Additionally, public procurement can play a crucial role in creating stable markets for smallholder farmers, enabling them to invest further in productivity improvements.

The agri-food sector is fundamental to the well-being of both African and European populations yet received too little attention at the 6<sup>th</sup> AU-EU Heads of State Summit held in February 2022. Building on the Joint Communiqué stemming from the 3<sup>rd</sup> EU-AU Ministerial meeting of May 2025, now is the time to leverage a **joint vision supported by powerful recommendations for collective action in the lead-up to the 7<sup>th</sup> AU-EU Heads of State Summit**. This vision must be well-grounded in understanding the diversity and potential of agri-food activities - drawing from the Kampala CAADP 3 Strategy 2026-35 and the EU's Vision for the Agri-food Sector to 2040.

## Joint Priority Areas of Focus:

### 1. Strengthening the Africa-EU Agri-Food Partnership Through Strategic Alignment and Cooperation

The complexity of agri-food systems requires a concerted effort to align African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) strategies, emphasizing joint human and financial investment in strategic value chains. Both parties must balance the production of both cash and basic food crops to ensure nutrition security and economic resilience within both the blue and green economy. A key focus should be on developing strategic food corridors that enhance regional integration and trade, fostering conditions for capacity sharing and driving a productive, nutritious, and resilient agri-food agenda. Fundamental enablers, such as investment in healthy soils, secure land tenure, and sustainable practices are crucial, as they generate positive externalities including improved rural economies and employment and carbon sequestration, which deliver broader environmental goals.

#### Priority Areas of Focus:

- **Align AU-EU Strategies around joint investment in strategic value chains:** Prioritize coordinated funding and human resource development, working with both the private and public sector in green and blue agri-food value chains, ensuring balanced support for both cash and food crops.
- **Enhance strategic food corridors to boost regional integration and trade:** Invest in infrastructure and policies that facilitate efficient movement of agri-food products across regions, promoting market access and economic resilience.
- **Invest in foundational enablers for a resilient agri-food system:** Support initiatives that improve soil health, secure land tenure, and sustainable agricultural practices such as agroecology, recognizing their role in generating environmental benefits like carbon sequestration, and better water management.
- **Strengthen the role of farmers' organisations and youth engagement in agriculture:** Empower farmers' organisations to better represent farmers' interests, scale up value chains, deliver economic services, and design effective extension systems. Prioritize engaging youth in agriculture to introduce innovative ideas and modern farming techniques, ensuring the long-term vitality and sustainability of agri-food systems.

## 2. Advancing Africa-Europe Agri-Food Investment for Sustainable Development and Resilience

The agri-food sector in Africa remains under-supported, exposing the continent to heightened risks related to peace, health, and poverty. Addressing these vulnerabilities calls for a “no regrets” investment approach that allocates more and smarter resources—including human capital, technology, and finance—into agri-food systems. Mobilizing capital from diverse sources such as domestic resource mobilization (DRM), taxation, remittances, illicit financial flows (IFFs), improved trade partnerships, official development assistance (ODA), and climate finance is essential to fulfil the ambitions of the Kampala Declaration and achieve the target of \$200 billion annually. This requires enhanced Africa-EU joint ventures, co-investments, and public-private partnerships (PPPs), which draws in Team Europe actors in support of CAADP3.

EU investments should be prioritized to support initiatives that reduce Africa’s import dependence by boosting local processing and value addition, to promote diverse and nutritious diets, and develop critical infrastructure including transport and storage, thereby reinforcing long-term food system resilience and economic growth. Furthermore, innovative finance mechanisms are needed to facilitate funding of land regeneration and restoration, SME growth and development to scale-up agri-food value chains and spread impactful experience, creating a more conducive environment for impact investment in the agri-food economy.

Certain investments, such as those in soil health, land tenure, crop storage, sustainable resource management, and agroecological practices, are inherently valuable and will yield positive outcomes irrespective of how external conditions evolve. Overall, the ‘no regrets’ investment approach provides a framework for making strategic decisions that are likely to deliver long-term benefits.

### Priority Areas of Focus:

- **Adopt a no-regrets investment approach mobilizing diverse capital sources:** Scale up and diversify funding streams—domestic and international—to meet the \$200 billion annual investment target set in the Kampala Declaration, ensuring priority allocations for agri-food system transformation and resilience.
- **Promote Africa-EU Joint Ventures and Public-Private Partnerships:** Facilitate collaborative investments that leverage expertise and resources, strengthen private sector linkages, and drive value chain development, local processing, and better nutritional outcomes.
- **Prioritize EU investments to reduce import dependency and build strategic infrastructure:** Focus on projects that enhance local transformation capacities, improve diet diversity, develop transport and storage infrastructure to strengthen food security and regional markets.
- **Funding and risk mitigation for transition:** Mechanisms are needed to finance the transition to more resilient food systems, to include provision of advisory services and insurance to mitigate the risks associated with adopting new agricultural practices. Public funding needs to de-risk critical private investments and encourage greater private sector participation in the transition, by leveraging public development banks to attract private sector investment in agriculture. Agriculture is currently the weakest area in terms of finance blending and guarantees.

### 3. Addressing Asymmetries in the Africa-EU Agri-Food Partnership for Equitable Growth

The Africa-EU agri-food partnership currently faces significant asymmetries, including extractive trade models and persistent trade barriers that hinder equitable development. To build a more balanced and mutually beneficial relationship, it is essential to improve trade patterns and leverage trade as a powerful engine for sustainable development.

This includes clarifying and advancing positions on key regulatory frameworks such as the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), while articulating clear, forward-looking propositions for Africa-EU agri-food relations rooted in mutual commercial interests. Integrating agri-food systems into new EU-Africa Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships (CTIPs) will further strengthen cooperation and drive investment in a sector which clearly needs it.

Additionally, enhancing transparency through the creation of a single, comprehensive repository to track and monitor Africa-Europe agri-food commitments and initiatives will promote accountability and foster coordinated progress across both continents

#### Priority Areas of Focus:

- **Address trade asymmetries by enhancing fair and development-oriented trade patterns:** Reform trade frameworks and reduce barriers to promote balanced, sustainable agri-food trade that benefits both Africa and the EU. Explore how best to include agri-food systems within the new generation of EU-Africa Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships, and identify pathways for enhanced market access.
- **Clarify and align regulatory approaches on EUDR, CSDDD, and a range of phyto-sanitary standards and NTBs which act as barriers to trade:** Develop clear joint positions and strategies that reflect mutual commercial interests and foster cooperation under evolving regulatory environments, with direct implications on livelihoods and revenues of African producers and smallholders.
- **Establish a unified monitoring system for EU-Africa agri-food commitments:** Create a centralized repository to track and evaluate Europe-Africa as well as G7 and G20 agri-food projects and initiatives, enhancing transparency, coordination, and accountability – and duplicating those with the tangible results.

#### On the road to the 7th AU-EU Heads of State Summit:

As the 7th AU-EU Heads of State Summit approaches, strengthening the Africa-Europe agri-food partnership is critical, focusing on strategic alignment and cooperation, finance and investment, and addressing asymmetries for improved trade and market access.

Together, these actions will drive a productive, nutritious, and resilient agri-food agenda that fosters regional integration, economic empowerment, and environmental sustainability across both continents.

As preparations intensify for the upcoming AU-EU Heads of State Summit, it is critical to leverage key policy milestones—including the Sevilla Financing for Development Conference (Ff4D), the UNFSS+4 Stocktake in Addis Ababa, the second Africa Climate Summit (ACS), the Brussels Global Gateway Forum, and COP30 in Belém—as strategic opportunities to embed agri-food systems more firmly within the Africa-Europe Partnership agenda.