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# AFRICAN UNION FOOD SECURITY AGENDA IN AN ERA OF PROTECTIONISM

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Africa has 60 percent of the world's available arable land and agriculture is the source of livelihood for 70 percent of the population. Yet the continent generates only 10 percent of global agricultural output. According to FAO report of food security and nutrition of 2022, 278 million people are reported to be affected by hunger in Africa in 2021. Africa is the region where the prevalence is highest and with largest increase compared to the year 2019.

In a bid to boost agriculture and nutrition, the African Union Commission (AUC) has partnered with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)

Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to increase food production and accessibility in Africa. The collaboration will involve implementing strategies outlined in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and other frameworks, as well as promoting value addition of raw materials through agro-processing and market sectors in Member States.

The AUC is also committed to supporting Africa's transition to a green economy by promoting sustainable natural resource management and mitigating the effects of climate change without compromising growth.

The momentum of implementing the CAADP will be sustained by supporting Member States in aligning their policies and strategies with their agricultural sector. Key interventions, such as livestock production, land policy, agricultural inputs, and product markets, will be accelerated to increase productivity in African agriculture.

In addition to these efforts, the Commission will advocate for the allocation of 10% of national budget to agriculture and facilitate other measures to increase productivity in African agriculture. The Commission will also promote knowledge, innovation, and technology for agricultural transformation through rural infrastructure development and value addition.

As protectionism continues to rise around the world, African agriculture is facing a number of challenges that threaten to undermine the food security agenda of African Union (AU). These challenges include the proliferation of trade barriers that limit the ability of African farmers to access key international markets, as well as the potential impact of climate change on African agriculture.

At the same time, there are also a number of opportunities that could help to drive agricultural development and improve food security in Africa. These opportunities include the use of technology to increase agricultural productivity, the promotion of regional trade and integration, and increased investment in African agriculture.

In this article, we will examine the key challenges and opportunities facing the AU's food security agenda, and will discuss the strategies that are needed to address these challenges and fully realize the potential of African agriculture. By doing so, I hope to contribute to the ongoing conversation around food security in Africa, and to help chart a path forward for the continent's agriculture sector in an era of protectionism.

## **THE AU'S COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO FOOD SECURITY**

The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) was endorsed by African Heads of State in 2003 as part of the NEPAD. Its goal is to accelerate growth by eliminating poverty and hunger in Africa. Four pillars guide the effort to implement approved plans: extending irrigation and water control systems, improving rural infrastructure and trade-related

capacities, increasing food supply and reducing hunger, and improving agricultural research and technology dissemination. CAADP emphasizes adhering to principles such as ensuring a 6% annual growth rate in the agricultural sector, allocating 10% of the national budget to agriculture, exploiting regional complementarities, and developing partnerships with stakeholders like farmers, agribusiness, and civil society communities. Individual countries have designated roles and responsibilities for implementation, with coordination facilitated by Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the NEPAD Secretariat.

The AU's comprehensive approach to food security is a vital step towards tackling the pressing issue of hunger and malnutrition on the continent. While the program's early focus was on national-level initiatives, stakeholders are now recognizing the need to shift their attention towards a more regional approach. By leveraging resources, expertise, and ideas across borders, the hope is that CAADP can achieve even greater success in raising agricultural productivity and promoting sustainable development throughout the continent.

One of the key strengths of the AU's approach is its focus on the entire agricultural value chain, from production to marketing and distribution. This holistic approach recognizes that improving food security requires addressing a range of interrelated challenges, including low agricultural productivity, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to markets.

For example, Rwanda has steadily increased its budgetary contribution to agriculture since signing its CAADP Compact in 2006. Rwanda allocated 10.2% of its national budget to the agriculture sector for the fiscal year 2010/11 and achieved an agricultural sector growth of 7.4% in 2010.

In Ethiopia, The Multi-Donor Trust Fund's Midterm Review of CAADP found that despite exceeding budgetary and agricultural growth targets, the impact of Ethiopia's engagement in CAADP cannot be adequately measured. However, the process has brought together stakeholders and prompted a review of agricultural budget allocations. In addition, cereal production has increased by 60% in just a few years, leading to a significant reduction in food insecurity.

Despite these strengths, the AU's food security agenda faces a number of significant challenges. In particular, rising protectionism around the world is making it

increasingly difficult for African farmers to access key international markets, and is limiting the ability of African agriculture to contribute to economic growth and development.

### **RUSSIA AND UKRAINE CONFLICT AND AFRICAN FOOD SECURITY**

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has a profound impact on food security in Africa. The sudden shortage of wheat, maize, and other grains imported from these countries is putting the continent's food supply chains to the test, just as it recovers from the global pandemic. In an exclusive interview with *The National*, Dr Akinwumi Adesina, the president of the African Development Bank (AfDB), warns that the situation could lead to civil unrest if it is not addressed urgently.

Russia and Ukraine account for almost a quarter of the world's wheat exports and one fifth of the world's barley exports. Since the start of February, 2022, prices of grains have risen dramatically, by anywhere between 22 to 37 percent. Wheat alone accounts for an estimated 20 percent of human calorie consumption, mostly in poor nations where bread is a staple food.

Dr Adesina highlights the growing gap between cereal crop production and consumption in Africa, putting the continent at risk of food insecurity. He warns that if Africa does not take action now and supports its food production, it could face a looming food crisis and civil unrest. The effect on Africa could be serious, and many African countries, such as Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, and Kenya, could face significant problems.

The AfDB has formulated a \$1 billion emergency food production plan for Africa to mitigate the impact of the Ukraine crisis. Dr Adesina explains that the initiative will reach 20 million farmers with technologies to produce wheat as well as rice, resulting in 30 million metric tons of food with a value of \$12 billion. This plan will help to alleviate the impact on Africa, which must work tirelessly to be self-sufficient in feeding itself in the years to come.

### **THE EFFECTS OF PROTECTIONISM ON AFRICAN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY**

As Africa's population continues to grow, the continent's reliance on food imports has also increased,

prompting many countries to consider implementing trade barriers and tariffs to reduce the influx. However, this trend towards protectionism can have significant negative impacts on African agriculture and food security.

From 1999 to 2015, food imports for the continent increased at a rate of 3.3% annually, which is faster than the population growth. This growth in imports is closely linked to the transformation of agri-food systems, driven by rising incomes and rapid urbanization. As a result, food consumption is shifting towards more processed, purchased, and prepared options outside the home.

Recent years have seen a global trend towards protectionism, with many countries implementing new trade barriers and restrictions on imports and exports. This has raised concerns about the impact of protectionism on global trade and economic growth, leading to calls for increased cooperation and coordination between countries to promote open and fair trade.

One of the most apparent impacts of protectionism on African agriculture and food security is limiting access to food. Imported goods have become more expensive due to tariffs and other restrictions, making it challenging for vulnerable populations to access the food they need, leading to malnutrition and hunger.

Protectionist policies can also negatively impact African farmers as they face increased competition from heavily subsidized foreign agricultural producers. This can make it difficult for African farmers to compete in the global market and can limit their ability to sell their goods abroad. Protectionist policies can also undermine agricultural development in Africa by limiting investment in the sector and reducing the potential for economic growth.

For instance, a study in 2020 examined the effects of trade facilitation measures on food security in Africa and found that poor trade facilitation can significantly exacerbate food insecurity in Africa. The study suggests that reducing undue delays in cross-border trade and ensuring timely delivery of goods can significantly enhance food security in Africa. The study notes that investments in expanding or enhancing transport infrastructure can also help reduce excessive delays in moving goods within and across African borders.

The consumption of food will continue to remain the same with the increase in protectionism. A recent study investigated whether tariffs on imports of edible oils can stimulate demand and production of domestic varieties

in Tanzania. The results from this study indicate that price-based policy interventions are unlikely to stimulate significant changes in the consumption patterns of domestic and imported oils.

**CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON FOOD SECURITY**

Climate change is expected to have a significant impact on African agriculture and food security in the coming years. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events are all expected to affect crop yields and lead to increased pest and disease pressures. In addition, climate change is expected to have a significant impact on water availability, which is a critical resource for agricultural production.

The AU’s food security agenda addresses climate change by promoting sustainable agricultural practices and investing in the development of climate-resilient crops. However, there is still much more that needs to be done in order to mitigate the impact of climate change on African agriculture.

Some regions of Africa are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. For example, the Sahel region of Africa, which encompasses parts of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal, is expected to experience increased temperatures, reduced rainfall, and increased desertification as a result of climate change. This is likely to have a significant impact on the region’s ability to produce food, and could lead to increased levels of food insecurity.

According to recent projections, cereal production growth in Sub-Saharan Africa is set to decline by 3.2 percent due to the effects of climate change. The yield growth of staple crops such as wheat and sweet potatoes is expected to be negatively impacted by 4.6 percent, though this decline will be partially offset by a 2.1 percent increase in area expansion. Interestingly, millet and sorghum are projected to experience slightly higher yields under climate change.

Unfortunately, the consequences of these changes go beyond agriculture alone. By 2050, the prices of maize, rice, and wheat are expected to increase by 4, 7, and 15 percent, respectively, compared to historic levels. This will result in a 1.5 percent decline in food demand across Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, while net cereal imports are expected to remain largely unchanged across the region, Eastern Africa is projected to experience a 15 per-

cent increase due to significant declines in maize yields.

Perhaps most concerning of all is the projected impact on childhood malnutrition. Incremental increases from climate change alone are expected to affect just under 1 million children by 2030, with 585,000 still facing malnutrition by 2050. Clearly, these changes are set to have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for the region, and urgent action is needed to mitigate their effects.

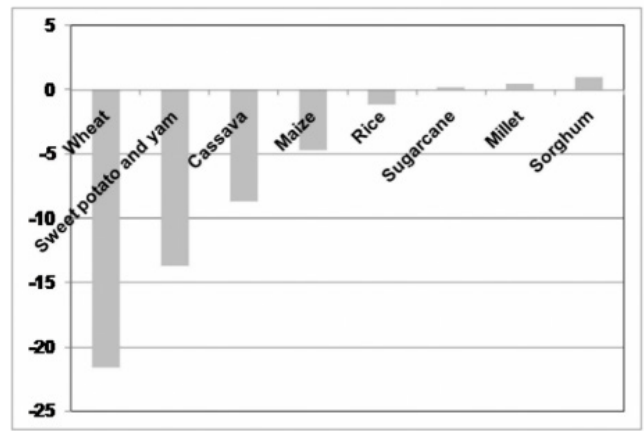


Figure 1: 2050 yield projection per crop as a result of climate change (source: Ringler et al., 2010)

**THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ADDRESSING FOOD SECURITY CHALLENGES**

Technology can play a critical role in addressing the challenges facing African agriculture and food security. The Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) encourages AU Member States to use technology to increase agricultural production. Modern agricultural technologies, including robotics and digital technology devices, could boost productivity. For example, the development of drought-resistant crops, the use of precision agriculture techniques, and the implementation of mobile phone-based agricultural extension services. African countries such as Kenya and Rwanda have utilised AI-enabled drone technologies to apply pesticides on crops, improve irrigation schedules and field management.

The AU is working to promote the use of technology in agriculture through initiatives such as the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), which aims to improve the productivity of smallholder farmers through

the development and dissemination of agricultural technologies. AATF is active in 23 countries of East, Southern and West Africa, currently addressing challenges bedeviling key staples in Sub-Saharan Africa that include maize, rice, cassava, cowpeas, bananas and potatoes. Table 1 shows the statistics of the AATF achievement.

Category	Number
Number of total beneficiaries reached (farmers and other stakeholders)	12877887
Number of Smallholder farmers directly reached	5,172,122
Number of Market system value chain actors	81,215
Number of Seed companies and agrodealers engaged	451
Number of Metric tonnes of New product seed sold	27,694.87
Number of Hectares of Land area cultivated with AATF products	1,176,394.80
Number of Countries in Africa with AATF presence/reach/coverage	23
Number of farmers that AATF has educated on mechanization	656,783

Table 1: AATF achievement statistics (source: <https://www.aatf-africa.org/> accessed on 27th February 2023).

However, there are still significant challenges that need to be overcome in order to fully realize the potential of technology in African agriculture. For example, many farmers may not have access to the necessary technology, such as smartphones or computers, to take advantage of mobile-based agricultural extension services. In addition, there may be limited access to financing for the adoption of new technologies, particularly for smallholder farmers.

One among the projects of AAF is the Cassava Mechanisation and Agro-processing Project (CAMAP). Cassava is a crop that is highly valued in Sub-Saharan Africa for its economic importance. However, farmers in the region have been struggling to achieve high yields, with an average of only 7-9 tonnes per hectare. Hence, the CAMAP aims to revitalize the cassava industry by introducing mechanized production and agro-processing techniques across the entire cassava value chain.

Since its launch in 2013, the CAMAP project has been successful in increasing the efficiency and timeliness of operations. This has resulted in a 200% increase in yields, a 100% increase in incomes, and an improved quality of life for farmers. The project has also attracted more women and youth into cassava farming as a business. The success of CAMAP in Nigeria has led to the formation of Agridrive, which offers mechanization services as a business.

## THE NEED FOR INCREASED INVESTMENT IN AFRICAN AGRICULTURE

One of the key challenges facing the AU's food security agenda is the need for increased investment in African agriculture. Despite the potential for agricultural development to drive economic growth and reduce poverty on the continent, agricultural investment in Africa remains low.

One of the main barriers to agricultural investment in Africa is the perception that agriculture is a risky investment. This perception is often based on the assumption that African agriculture is inherently risky due to the prevalence of droughts, pests, and other challenges. However, as the success of initiatives such as CAADP and the Malabo Declaration demonstrate, targeted investment in agriculture can lead to significant improvements in food security and economic growth.

There is a need for increased public and private investment in African agriculture in order to achieve the goals of the AU's food security agenda. This investment could take the form of increased government funding for agricultural research and development, greater access to financing for smallholder farmers, and increased private sector investment in African agriculture.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the AU's comprehensive approach to food security is a significant step forward in addressing the urgent issue of hunger and malnutrition in Africa. However, the road ahead is still long, and much work needs to be done to achieve the goals of the AU's food security agenda. In the face of rising protectionism, the challenges to the AU's food security agenda are formidable, but there are also opportunities for growth and development. By embracing the African Continental Free Trade Area, sustainable agriculture, healthy diets, increased investment in agriculture, and technological innovations, the AU can overcome these challenges and promote food security in Africa. For this to happen, there must be a greater commitment to investment in agriculture, a focus on sustainability, and a steadfast determination to ensure that all Africans have access to nutritious and affordable food. Together, we can create a future for Africa that is better and free from poverty and malnutrition. 