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Three partnership priorities for building productive, resilient, and sustainable agri-food systems in Africa

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- This paper outlines three complementary areas of focus – value chain structuring, sector financing and market access – that a renewed partnership between Africa and France should target in order to make African agri-food systems productive, resilient and sustainable
- Published ahead of the Africa Forward Summit (May 11-12, 2026), it identifies avenues for collective action and stresses the need to coordinate public and private interventions in order to address the challenges facing African agriculture
- It highlights the potential of public-private partnerships to structure value chains and train agri-entrepreneurs, of blended finance and innovative financial instruments to reduce sector risk, and of quality certification schemes and measures to secure market access conditions to develop trade flows

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African agriculture faces structural challenges that every exogenous shock has brought to light, from the financial crisis of the 2000s to recent major events: COVID-19, Russia's war against Ukraine, and the war in the Middle East. Beyond agricultural trade imbalances, the dependence of many African countries on fuel and fertilizer imports from Gulf countries further weakens their agriculture through rising production costs and yield losses.

Yet this sector currently employs 45% of Africa's working population and accounts for 21% of GDP.[1] These cyclical shocks amplify deep-rooted structural vulnerabilities: rapid population growth, climate change, soil degradation and biodiversity loss, chronic insecurity, weak physical and market infrastructure, and institutional and regulatory frameworks that are sometimes inefficient. All of these factors keep the continent's agricultural productivity low.

The diagnosis has been clearly established[2] and is widely shared. Since the adoption of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) in 2003, African countries have had a common continental strategy. The Maputo (2003)[3] and Malabo (2014)[4] Declarations set a target of 10% of public spending allocated to agriculture, a goal that has not yet been achieved on a continental scale. The Kampala Declaration (2025)[5] reaffirmed this commitment and set new targets for 2035: increasing agri-food production by 45%, halving post-harvest losses, tripling intra-African trade in agri-food products and inputs, raising the share of locally processed foods to 35%, and mobilizing $100 billion in investments over the next ten years to achieve this. Establishing productive, resilient, and sustainable agri-food systems in Africa remains a major challenge that will require the action and coordination of multiple stakeholders, both public and private, national and international.

These objectives are not solely in the continent's interest in terms of the environment, growth, and food security. African agricultural exports - both food and non-food - can play a key role in European supply chains and provide essential raw materials for international industrial production. For example, Africa produces 70% of the world's cocoa[6] and 60% of cashews.[7] Côte d'Ivoire is the world's third-largest producer of natural rubber,[8] and the continent is a major exporter of cotton, behind the United States and Brazil.

Agriculture must be central to the partnership between Africa and Europe, with France's support. This centrality was affirmed at the highest political level in November 2025 during the 7th AU-EU Summit in Luanda.[9] It is also reflected in the joint France-Kenya communiqué announcing the Africa Forward Summit[10] and listing sustainable agriculture among the summit's strategic priorities. For France - whose agro-industrial actors and training-research-innovation ecosystem in agriculture have well-established expertise - this issue is of the utmost importance in helping Europe build this new agricultural and trade partnership with Africa.

The commitments made at the Africa Forward Summit by public and private actors can catalyze collective action, create a ripple effect, and send a strong signal to all stakeholders in support of investment in sustainable African agricultural value chains.

This note identifies three areas of focus with significant multiplier effects that align with the commitments of the Kampala Declaration: (I) the structuring of value chains, (II) the financing of agricultural sectors, with a particular emphasis on African agricultural entrepreneurship, and (III) access to markets, both within and outside the continent. For each of these areas, the aim is to highlight the barriers, promising initiatives, and how public and private interventions can be coordinated to address the challenges facing African agriculture.

1. Source : https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators
2. Gravellini J.-M. (2025) État des lieux de l'agriculture, de l'élevage, de l'agro-industrie et des politiques agricoles en Afrique. Proposition pour un rôle accru du secteur privé et une professionnalisation des acteurs au sein de chaînes de valeur plus performantes. Ferdi Working paper P361.
3. African Union, 2003, Assembly/AU/Decl. 7 (II)
4. African Union, 2014, Assembly/AU/2 (XXIII)
5. African Union, 2025, Ext./Assembly/Decl./3(XIX)
6. Source: https://www.icco.orgf
7. Source: https://ourworldindata.org
8. Source: https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/QCL
9. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/
10. https://www.elysee.fr

1. Structuring agricultural value chains: Strengthening public-private partnerships

The first area of focus concerning value chains is closely linked to the competitiveness of African agriculture. African agriculture is characterized by lower productivity than in other regions of the world. For example, cereal yields are 2 tons per hectare in Africa, compared to 3.8 tons in South Asia and 4.5 tons in Latin America.[11] This cannot be explained by a single limiting factor, but rather results from several interdependent constraints, many of which stem from value chains that lack sufficient strategic organization and planning.

At the input and production stages, ensuring continuous and affordable access to high-quality seeds and fertilizers, as well as to the information and technologies needed to use them effectively, poses a major challenge. The resulting difficulties undermine crop yields and the quality of production. Furthermore, significant quantitative and qualitative losses are common during harvesting, storage, and transport. These vary by product group but are particularly high for fruits and vegetables in sub-Saharan Africa, reaching up to 50% of production.[12] Finally, downstream in the value chains, there is very often a lack of local value added from agricultural processing activities. A large proportion of agricultural products are exported as raw materials, and the processed products are then reimported, resulting in a loss of economic value, insufficient local employment, and increased dependence on imports. Cotton is a prime example, as it remains primarily an export crop[13] for Africa, even as the textile industry develops, particularly in Benin and Cameroon.

The lack of infrastructure is identified as a major bottleneck in the functioning of agricultural value chains. It increases input and production costs, disrupts the supply chain, and makes market access unstable. Vocational training for farmers in Africa also suffers from underinvestment, which limits the adoption of innovations or best practices and the development of a more professional agricultural entrepreneurship that is better integrated into a high-performing economic environment.

While the provision of infrastructure, research, and training are primarily the responsibility of the public sector, the private sector must be more involved at various stages of the value chains. It should be encouraged to play a major role as a producer, supplier, and distributor of inputs, providing transportation and post-harvest storage services, and building and operating agricultural processing and marketing downstream infrastructures.

The barley and maize supply chains in Ethiopia, South Africa, and Cameroon illustrate these potential roles for private actors. Breweries coordinate upstream production through contract farming, organizing farmers into groups or cooperatives, supplying inputs, and managing collection and transport, before processing the crop locally for the domestic market. In other sectors, producer organizations and cooperatives assume this structuring role, as in the cocoa sector in Côte d'Ivoire, where cooperatives organize collection, quality control, and price negotiation.

The private sector also has a key role to play in fostering entrepreneurship and scaling up agricultural and technological innovations tailored to local conditions. This can be achieved in collaboration with national and international public partners. This is the goal of initiatives such as the International Innovation Hub[14]: to create synergies among an ecosystem of public institutions, academic and research stakeholders in France and Africa to foster the development of innovative projects led by startups and young high-impact companies in the African agri-food sector.

Ultimately, recognizing the private sector as a driving force behind agriculture is both an imperative of economic efficiency and a key to genuine transformation in African agriculture and livestock farming.

For Summit stakeholders, the priority should be to strengthen public-private partnerships to structure value chains. These partnerships offer significant potential in several areas: vocational training

11. Source: https://databank.worldbank.org
12. Source : https://openknowledge.fao.org
13. https://www.oecd.org/fr/publications
14. https://www.institut-agro-montpellier.fr/actualites/

for farmers, support for producer organizations, pooling of agricultural machinery and access to energy for agricultural processing and post-harvest storage. They enable the resources and expertise of the private sector to be combined with the strategic guidance capabilities of public actors. Such partnerships create significant leverage and facilitate scaling up without placing an excessive burden on public finances.

2. Financing agricultural sectors: directing public funds toward instruments with high leverage

Agricultural activity is inherently risky. This risk stems primarily from the unpredictable nature of harvests - exacerbated by the increasing frequency of climate shocks - and from price volatility in domestic and international markets. The infrastructure deficit and the weak structuring of value chains, described above, exacerbate lenders' and investors' perception of risk. The result is massive underinvestment: while agriculture accounts for about 21% of the continent's GDP, it receives less than 5% of bank loans in many African countries.[15]

The African Development Bank (AfDB) estimates the annual financing gap in Africa's agricultural sector at $75 billion. This gap particularly affects the "missing middle" - agribusiness entrepreneurs and SMEs - even though these enterprises are essential to the structuring of value chains. These actors are too large for microfinance but too small for commercial banks and investment funds, which consider this market segment insufficiently profitable given their transaction costs.

Given these constraints, the challenge is to reduce both the actual and perceived risk in the sector in order to attract long-term private financing. This requires the development of risk management tools tailored to the sector, financial and digital innovation, and blended finance approaches in which public intervention plays a catalytic role.

Agricultural risk management is a first lever.[16, 17] For production risks, index-based insurance provides rapid compensation and cost-effective risk coverage. In Kenya and Ethiopia, a livestock protection program was tested using a satellite-based vegetation cover index; in Senegal, index-based insurance solutions have been developed for cereals, cotton, and peanuts. For risks related to price volatility, warehouse receipt systems allow producers to store their harvest as collateral for a loan rather than selling at low prices at harvest time, and to market it later at a more profitable price. These systems, already deployed in Tanzania and several Sahel countries, help stabilize incomes and, by enabling collateralization, make the sector more attractive to investors.

Financial and digital innovation is a second lever. Mobile money, which has been widely adopted in sub-Saharan Africa, already facilitates transactions and payments and offers the potential to expand access to credit and insurance. Furthermore, given the frequent lack of land titles or formalized assets, using agricultural products as collateral helps overcome the major obstacle of insufficient guarantees. This is the logic behind contract farming, which should be scaled up.

The third lever is blended finance, which combines public or concessional resources with private capital.[18] By absorbing first losses or providing guarantees, public financing reduces the risk profile of agricultural investments and helps attract private capital that would not otherwise step in. Recent initiatives illustrate this approach by combining financing with technical support: the FASA Fund[19] (Financing for Agricultural SMEs in Africa), designed as a fund of funds targeting agricultural and agro-industrial SMEs, and the AfDB's Agri-Food SME Catalytic Financing Mechanism (ACFM).[20]

15. https://www.afdb.org

16. de Janvry A., Sadoulet E. (2024) Risques et assurance agricoles dans les pays de l'UEMOA. Ferdi Report.
17. Hamadou Daouda Y., (2026) Étude sur les risques-prix dans le secteur agricole en UEMOA. Ferdi Report, forthcoming.
18. Gravellini J.-M. (2023) "Structuration d'un fonds pour les entreprises privées dans les secteurs de l'agriculture, de l'agro-industrie et de l'élevage en zone UEMOA", Ferdi Report, 20 p.
19. https://www.fasafund.com
20. https://www.afdb.org

For the Summit stakeholders, the priority should be to move beyond the traditional model of concessional financing and channel public funds toward financial tools where they are likely to have the greatest leverage: innovative guarantee and risk management instruments, and blended finance vehicles that make African agriculture attractive to private capital, both domestic and international.

3. Market access: Harmonizing certifications and securing market opportunities

The challenges of structuring and financing are inextricably linked to those of output markets: without access to markets, investments in agricultural value chains will not generate the returns necessary for their long-term viability. To achieve this, African agricultural products must overcome the constraints associated with the small size of domestic markets and find export destinations at the regional, continental and international levels. However, market access remains hampered by a series of obstacles related to product competitiveness, tariff and non-tariff barriers, and the predictability of trade conditions.

In terms of price competitiveness, the obstacles described in the two previous sections result in high production costs that hinder sales in domestic markets and put African exports at a disadvantage compared to those from other regions. A second aspect of competitiveness concerns the ability to meet the quality requirements of export markets, which increasingly incorporate environmental sustainability. From a regulatory standpoint, this entails compliance with sanitary, phytosanitary, and environmental standards for food products. The challenge here is twofold for African agriculture: adapting production practices to the requirements of target markets and having the technical and institutional capacity to demonstrate compliance.

In this area, private sector actors play a key role. Quality certifications, such as Global G.A.P. (Good Agricultural Practice),[21] which are internationally recognized for agriculture, aquaculture, and floriculture, attest to production practices and health standards and facilitate access to international markets. Partnerships with specialized organizations such as COLEAD[22] enable African producers and exporters to better understand the regulatory requirements of destination markets and obtain international certifications.

In addition to quality certifications, the development of geographical indications (GIs) helps differentiate products. In Africa, two regional organizations oversee the protection of GIs: OAPI (African Intellectual Property Organization), which has an operational GI registration system and has registered six GIs to date,[23] including Penja pepper from Cameroon and Galmi purple onion from Niger; and ARIPO (African Regional Intellectual Property Organization), which is currently developing a legal framework for its member states. At the same time, registration in the European GI register offers protection and visibility in the EU market. Three African products are currently listed there: South African rooibos, Penja pepper, and Niger kilichi. Kenya is also considering a GI for its tea. GIs thus offer international recognition that can have a beneficial effect on market value, quality control, and farmers' incomes. Harmonizing GI systems across the continent and expanding their use for products of exceptional quality holds real potential for value creation.

Beyond product competitiveness, the predictability of trade conditions is a major factor affecting investment in export sectors.[24] Recent developments in access to the U.S. market illustrate this point. Since the United States imposed "reciprocal" tariffs starting in April 2025, the average tariff applied to African countries has risen from less than 0.5% to 10%. The expiration of the AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act) in September 2025 has added another shock: without preferential treatment, African exports of agricultural and manufactured goods would be subject to tariffs two to three times higher than those applied to

21. https://www.globalgap.org/
22. https://colead.link/fr/association/
23. https://intellectual-property-helpdesk.ec.europa.eu
24. https://unctad.org/news/

fuels and minerals. The retroactive renewal of the agreement through December 2026 does not eliminate the uncertainty. More generally, the instability of preferential programs (suspensions, revisions, conditions for graduating from the Least Developed Countries category) discourages long-term investment in export sectors and should be a focus of attention for international cooperation.

The growth of intra-African trade offers a structural solution to this vulnerability to shocks affecting preferential access to European and American markets. Today, 80% of African agricultural exports are destined for markets outside the continent, while only 20% are intra-continental.[25] Yet the potential is considerable: according to the AfDB, the African food and agricultural market could grow from $280 billion annually in 2023 to $1 trillion in 2030.[26] The complete implementation of the AfCFTA, by reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers within the continent, could significantly increase intra-African agricultural exports.[27] If African agricultural stakeholders succeed in seizing these opportunities, this integrated market will help structure regional value chains and strengthen the continent's food security by reducing its dependence on imports from outside the continent, which undermine entire segments of the African agricultural economy (oilseeds, grains, animal proteins, and dairy products, among others).

For the Summit stakeholders, the priority should be to promote export opportunities for African products capable of differentiation. This requires harmonizing certification systems to provide clear and actionable information to consumers, as well as ensuring fair access to African and European markets. However, it is important to bear in mind that while increased intra- and extra-continental trade can be facilitated by political will, it will ultimately depend on the competitiveness of African value chains.

25. Source : https://www.cepii.fr/DATA_DOWNLOAD
26. https://www.afdb.org/en/documents
27. https://www.uneca.org/

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