



CHAPTER 14

Conclusion: Toward Resilient and Sustainable African Food Systems

John M. Ulimwengu, Ebenezer Miezah Kwofie, and Julia Collins

The 2023 ATOR aims to inform the design of the post-Malabo phase of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The comprehensive discussions provided in this report offer a multifaceted blueprint to transform Africa's food systems in the post-Malabo era. From the in-depth analysis of the implementation challenges and successes of the Malabo Declaration to the exploration of cutting-edge approaches in bioeconomy and technology, this volume paves the way for a holistic and inclusive approach to food systems transformation in Africa. The findings underscore that while significant progress has been made in certain areas, such as the implementation of the CAADP/Malabo agenda, considerable challenges remain. These challenges are multidimensional, involving policy, institutional, and infrastructural barriers, and will need to be addressed with evidence-based, sustainable, and inclusive policies and practices.

Insights from the diverse chapters of this report provide a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities within post-Malabo African food systems. Every facet addressed here—whether it be policy, innovation, or sustainability—contributes to forming the picture of a continent ready for significant transformation.

From policy commitment to grounded action. Progress in the years following the Malabo Declaration reflects the diversity within African agriculture. The report underscores a continental dichotomy, with some countries showing commendable progress while others lag, tethered by institutional and policy constraints. A key conclusion is the need to move beyond the rhetoric of commitment to tangible action rooted in empirical evidence. The theoretical underpinnings of the Malabo agenda, while visionary, demand pragmatic execution grounded in solid data and responsive governance.

Food systems diagnostics: Malawi's microcosm. Malawi's journey embodies the complex interplay between national ambitions and the realities of implementation, which has been marked by environmental and economic hardships that challenge resilience. The lesson emerging from a diagnostic analysis of Malawi's food system is clear: policies must be backed by sustainable financial mechanisms and prioritized to generate the most significant multiplier effects on development. Malawi's experience suggests that the potential for synergy within policy execution is vast, but requires a harmonized approach to navigate trade-offs and amplify impacts.

Need to synchronize pledges. The responsiveness of African governments to their food systems transformation pledges is pivotal. The report identifies a continental imperative—the need for synchronized policy implementation that harmonizes country-specific contexts with collective goals. The World Health Organization's priority policies emerge as a guide, suggesting that innovative financial interventions like health taxes and subsidies could catalyze food systems transformation.

Nutrition-smart pathways. The call for nutrition-smart food systems is both urgent and compelling. Climate change, economic disparity, and public health crises present formidable barriers to adequate nutrition. Based on case studies of micronutrient adequacies in Senegal and Rwanda, the report suggests that African countries must overcome infrastructural, productivity, and policy challenges to foster food systems that prioritize health and environmental sustainability.

The imperative of food safety. Food safety is a critical yet often under-recognized facet of food systems. As Africa bears a disproportionate burden of foodborne diseases, a paradigm shift toward rigorous, risk-based food safety approaches from farm to table is essential. Such approaches hold promise to elevate food safety as a driver of agricultural and market development, public health, and food security.

Resilience and sustainability. The complex and interconnected nature of food systems demands holistic analysis and foresight. The report advocates for a nuanced understanding of trade-offs in policy strategies. Jointly assessing food system sustainability and resilience through the use of machine learning models and scenario planning can inform adaptive policy frameworks that navigate the trade-offs inherent in pursuing sustainable food systems.

Climate adaptation economics. Investing in climate adaptation is both an environmental and an economic imperative. The report's findings offer a strategic approach for aligning policies and investments to ensure increased food systems' resilience in the face of adverse climate-related events. This approach marks a shift from reactive to proactive, from short-term fixes to long-term, productivity-enhancing investments.

Gender-transformative change. Changing gender dynamics within food systems can open pathways for inclusive transformation. The report's discussion of gender shows that while there is no universal blueprint for increasing women's empowerment and inclusion, intentional, context-specific programming can

yield significant dividends. Gender-transformative approaches go beyond merely increasing participation, aiming to reshape norms and systems for more equitable and productive engagement of women and men.

Bioeconomy as a vehicle for change. The African bioeconomy offers great potential as a model for innovation and progress. The report calls for a strategic, continentwide approach that unites policy actions, investments, and innovations. This vision requires a political climate conducive to change, where grassroots actors including farmers and small and medium enterprises are integral to policy development. A thriving bioeconomy could position Africa as a formidable player in global food systems.

Data for informed decision-making. Quality data are fundamental to good decision-making. The report highlights ongoing efforts to enhance data availability but stresses the urgent need to develop comprehensive datasets to inform food system activities and policies. Open-access and digital dashboards are steps forward, but significant data gaps remain, particularly for indicators critical to food systems policy.

Investment in science and technology. The report's final thematic chapter reaffirms the importance of science, technology, and innovation as foundations for sustainable, productivity-led agricultural growth. The role of governments as both investors and enablers is underscored, highlighting the need for public investments and policy incentives that drive the creation of knowledge and dissemination of technology.

The *African Food Systems Transformation and the Post-Malabo Agenda* report portrays a continent at the crossroads of potential and action. Drawing together the rich insights from individual chapters makes it clear that Africa's food systems are ripe for transformation. But achieving this transformation will require a cohesive effort to embrace data-driven policies, foster innovation for sustainable ecosystems, prioritize nutrition-smart and safe food practices, and invest in the resilience and adaptability of agricultural systems. The report echoes a continent-wide call to action for food systems transformation, for a future where sustainable agriculture provides the basis for economic prosperity and a healthy society. The transformative journey ahead is complex, but with collaboration and strategic foresight, it promises resilience and prosperity for all of Africa's people.