

African Food Systems Forum: A Beacon of Hope for African Agriculture



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Introduction

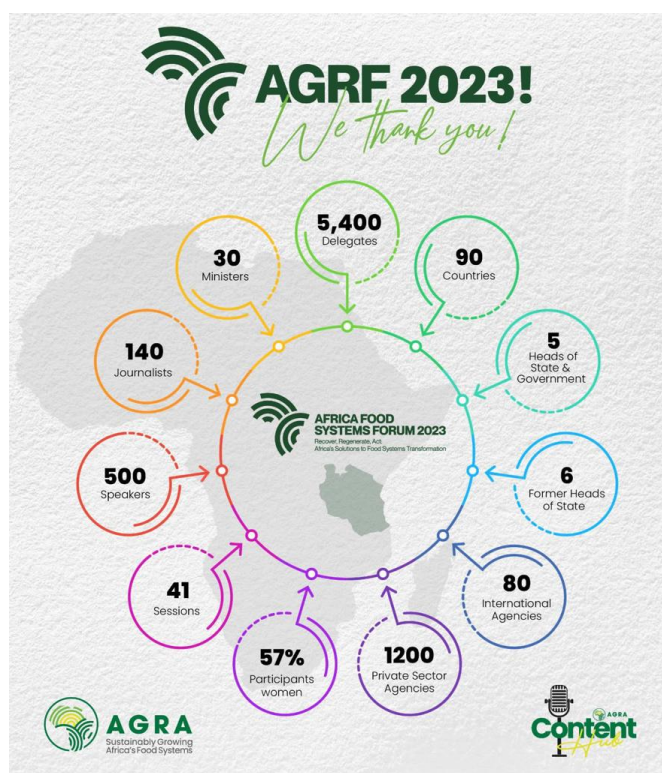
The 2023 Annual Green Revolution Forum (AGRF) held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, represented a pivotal moment in Africa's pursuit of food security and sustainable agricultural practices. As both a participant and observer, I had the privilege of witnessing the convergence of minds, ideas, and strategies aimed at addressing the continent's pressing agricultural challenges. In this comprehensive analysis, I will provide my perspective on AGRF 2023, with a specific focus on its crucial role in unveiling investment opportunities. Furthermore, I will delve into the evolution of AGRF and Tanzania's preparedness to welcome investors in key agricultural sectors under the visionary leadership of Her Excellency President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

The African Food Systems Forum, formerly known as AGRF, stands as the world's premier forum on African agriculture and food systems. Since its inception in 2010, AGRF has served as a vital platform for stakeholders from various sectors, including Heads of State, ministers, business leaders, development partners, farmers, youth, and women, to collaboratively address the multifaceted challenges facing African agriculture. It has consistently provided a space for identifying actionable measures and policies to advance the continent's food system development.

In 2022, AGRF underwent a significant transformation, evolving into the African Food Systems Forum. This rebranding reflected the partnership's vision for year-round engagement and continuous stakeholder involvement in food system transformation. While the annual summit remained a cornerstone of the forum's activities, the expanded focus now aimed to promote year-round discussions and actions crucial for achieving food security objectives across the continent.

AGRF 2023: The Setting in Dar es Salaam

Tanzania's selection as the host for AGRF 2023, following the last event held in 2012, was a testament to the nation's commitment to advancing agricultural transformation in Africa. According to the Deal Report provided by Ms. Vanessa Adams, VP Strategic Partnerships and COP at AGRA, the forum in Dar es Salaam convened approximately 5,400 delegates from 90 participating nations, including 5 heads of states, 6 former heads of states, 1,200 private sector companies, and 500 youth representatives, among others. These delegates, hailing from both international and regional backgrounds, shared a common dedication to shaping the food systems agenda. Notably, over 57% of the participants were women.



Statistical insights courtesy of AGRF Secretariat

The theme of Africa's Food Systems Forum 2023 Summit, ***"Recover, Regenerate, Act: Africa's Solutions to Food Systems Transformation,"*** serves as a strategic compass guiding the event's agenda. It places youth and women at the heart of efforts to build more resilient, equitable, and sustainable food systems.

- **Recover:**

This phase entails the implementation of decisive strategies and actions aimed at rebuilding food systems following multiple crises and shocks. It acknowledges the need for immediate responses to address vulnerabilities and ensure food security.

- **Act:**

This phase signifies the urgency for collective action. It urges the acceleration of food systems transformation through the implementation of improved policies, practices, and investments. This phase seeks to move beyond discussions and into tangible steps, echoing the forum's overarching message of action-oriented solutions for a food-secure Africa.

- **Regenerate:**

This phase underscores the importance of revitalizing natural capital resources through adaptation practices, innovation, and technology. It highlights the necessity of sustainable food production within the context of a changing climate, preserving the environment while meeting growing food demands.



The event's choice of location in Dar es Salaam, renowned for its strategic trade significance, underscored the pivotal role of trade and commerce within the agricultural sector. Dr. Philipo I. Mpango, the Vice President of the United Republic of Tanzania, presided over the official inauguration of the event, where he reiterated the Tanzanian Government's commitment to various initiatives aimed at enhancing resilience and transforming the food systems. These initiatives include substantial investments in agriculture financing through the Agricultural Development Bank (TADB), a significant four-fold increase in the budget allocated to the agriculture, livestock, and fisheries sector, as well as the implementation of programs like BBT-YIA and Agenda 10/30. These programs have set ambitious targets, with the goal of achieving a 10% growth rate in the agricultural sector by 2030, aligning seamlessly with the principles outlined in the Malabo and Maputo Declarations. This dedication to sustainable agricultural growth not only benefits Tanzania but also contributes to broader regional and continental goals.





Vice President Dr. Philipo I. Mpango presided over the AGRF event and delivered an address to the audience on September 5, 2023, at the Julius Nyerere International Convention Centre (JNICC) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.



The Vice President, Dr. Philipo I. Mpango, and the President of AGRA, Dr. Agnes Kabilata, jointly inaugurated the launch of the African Agriculture Report (AAR) during the AGRF 2023 event held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.



Tanzania's Day and Exhibitions: Spotlighting Innovations in Food Systems

The 2023 African Food Systems Forum was thoughtfully structured to dedicate specific days to participating African countries, allowing them to showcase their investments and initiatives. On the inaugural day, September 5, 2023, the spotlight was on the Ministry of Agriculture, which unveiled a wide range of investment opportunities. The following day, September 6, 2023, was dedicated to the Minister of Livestock and Fisheries, who provided valuable insights into the vast potential and opportunities within Tanzania's livestock sector.

On September 7, 2023, Tanzania took the center stage with the President's Build a Better Tomorrow (BBT) Legacy Program (LP) on Food Systems, representing a well-structured and high-quality initiative that translates Tanzania's BBT vision into a bankable program. This session aimed to mobilize partners to support Tanzania's strategy for creating youth employment in agri-food systems. Shifting focus to September 8, 2023, the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar played a prominent role, unveiling exciting opportunities within the blue economy. This strategic approach ensured that each day of the forum was dedicated to exploring and promoting distinct sectors and investment prospects.

At the heart of the 2023 AGRF, numerous exhibitors played a pivotal role in showcasing their products and interventions, all aimed at promoting sustainable food systems. Among these exhibitors, prominent organizations such as OCP, YARA, TAHA (Tanzania Horticultural Association), TIC (Tanzania Investment Centre), and IITA demonstrated their unwavering commitment to advancing agricultural practices and fostering economic growth within the sector. These exhibitions provided a platform for sharing innovative solutions and forging collaborations, contributing to the overall momentum of the forum.





Farmers' Forum: Nurturing Agricultural Solutions

The culmination of the 2023 Africa Food Systems Forum on September 8 marked a special occasion known as the "Farmers' Forum." This dedicated day provided a platform for farmers from across the continent to convene and engage in constructive dialogues. Their discussions centered on finding practical solutions to propel their endeavors to the next level of success. During the Farmers' Forum, participants had the opportunity to share their experiences, challenges, and innovations in agricultural practices. They delved into topics such as sustainable farming techniques, access to resources, market opportunities, and the role of technology in modern agriculture. Moreover, this interactive platform facilitated networking and knowledge exchange among farmers, enabling them to learn from each other's successes and failures.

The Farmers' Forum underscored the vital role of farmers as key stakeholders in Africa's food systems transformation. Their insights and contributions were highly valued, as they are at the forefront of food production and play a critical role in ensuring food security on the continent. By dedicating a day to the Farmers' Forum, the 2023 African Food Systems Forum acknowledged the importance of involving those who till the soil and nurture the crops in shaping the future of African agriculture. This inclusive approach emphasized the forum's commitment to promoting sustainable and farmer-centric solutions that would benefit not only the agricultural sector but also the entire continent.

AGRF 2023 Youth Town Hall: Amplifying Youth Voices in Agriculture

On September 7th, 2023, as part of AGRF 2023, an insightful Youth Town Hall event was organized to provide young people with an exclusive platform to present their concerns, hopes, and hurdles to policymakers and stakeholders. This forum aimed to foster interaction among young individuals and ecosystem players, facilitating meaningful engagement.

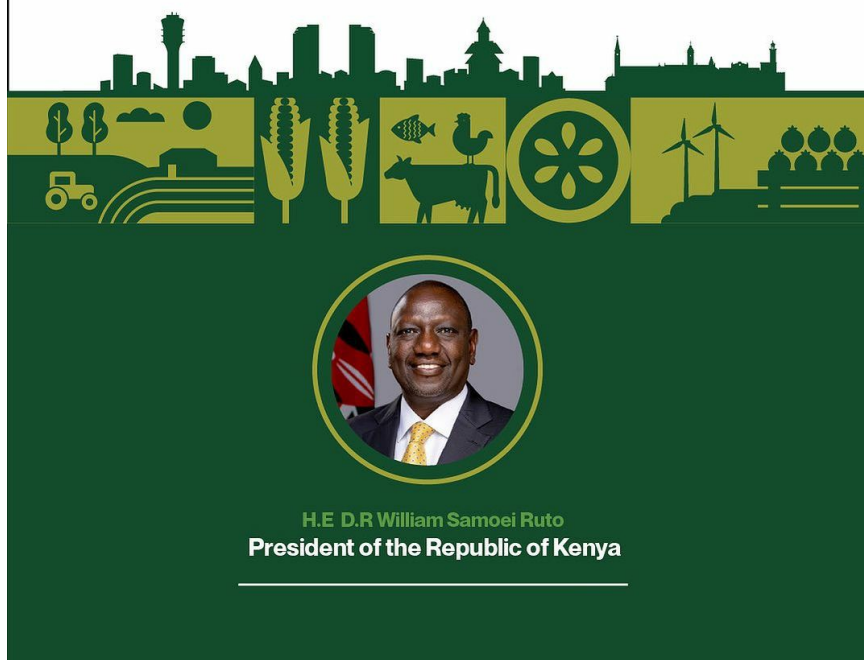


The Youth Town Hall received the esteemed presence of Her Excellency Samia Suluhu Hassan, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania. Her Excellency addressed the attendees and engaged in a lively debate, featuring questions and answers from invited Global Agriculture Youth Connect participants. This dynamic exchange of ideas and perspectives enriched the event and underscored the importance of youth engagement in agricultural transformation.

Moreover, during the Town Hall, AGRF's partnership recognized excellence among youth and women entrepreneurs. Notably, this year's Gogettaz Grand Prize Award was bestowed upon outstanding individuals from Nigeria and Madagascar, further highlighting the achievements and potential of young talents in the agriculture sector.

Presidential Summit at AGRF 2023: Reaffirming Leaders Commitment to Food Systems Transformation

On September 7th, a momentous event unfolded: the Presidential Summit. This summit was meticulously designed to foster high-level dialogues and solidify commitments aimed at propelling Africa's food systems transformation to new heights. It served as a catalytic force, igniting the formulation of Africa's stance on food systems, strengthening partnerships among nations, and birthing actionable plans and enduring legacy programs. The 2023 African Food Systems Summit attracted distinguished leaders, each bringing their unique perspectives and unwavering dedication to the table. Notable among them was H.E. Dr. William Samoei Ruto, the President of the Republic of Kenya. With fervor, he articulated that the sustainability of agriculture hinges on the active participation of the younger generation, infusing vitality, and innovation into this vital sector.



Photograph courtesy of AGRF Secretariat/ Ministry of Agriculture - Tanzania

H.E. Samia Suluhu Hassan, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, stood alongside her counterparts as a steadfast advocate for Africa's potential as a global food provider. She asserted, "As leaders of Africa, we stand ready and are committed to feeding the whole world," reflecting the continent's collective determination to nourish the global populace.



Photograph courtesy of AGRF Secretariat/ Ministry of Agriculture - Tanzania

From the Republic of Burundi, H.E. President General Evariste Ndayishimiye brought a vision of agricultural and breeding technologies that are reversing the rural-urban divide. In his compelling address, he revealed a phenomenon previously unseen in his country, where young people are departing urban centers to embark on expansive pastoral projects in rural areas.



Photograph courtesy of AGRF Secretariat/ Ministry of Agriculture - Tanzania

The Presidential Summit was not merely a gathering of leaders; it was a convergence of visionary minds, united in their resolve to shape Africa's food systems destiny. It was a day when commitments were etched in history, setting the stage for a brighter, more sustainable future for the continent and the world at large.

Key Messages, Insights and Call for Action from AGRF 2023

The AGRF 2023 was characterized by powerful messages and valuable insights that underscored the urgency of addressing food system challenges:

1. Placing Food Systems at the Core:

Honorable Bashe, the Minister of Agriculture for Tanzania, made a compelling case for Africa's food systems transformation by emphasizing the need to prioritize food systems as the central pillar of development.



Photograph courtesy of AGRF Secretariat/ Ministry of Agriculture - Tanzania

He articulated that this holistic approach acknowledges the intricate connections between food production, distribution, and access, forming the foundation of a resilient system. Honorable Bashe further emphasized this point by stating, "Our gathering today, following the 2022 Dakar Summit focused on food sovereignty and African Food Systems Transformation, underscores the critical role of placing women and youth at the forefront. It is essential for the resilience of Africa's food systems and the global economy."



Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Hussein Bashe, addressed the audience during the Tanzania Showcase, particularly unveiling the agricultural potential available in the country.



Minister of Livestock and Fisheries, Hon. Abdallah Ulega, addressed the audience during the Tanzania Showcase, particularly unveiling the livestock and fisheries potential available in the country.

2. From Talk to Action:

Dr. Agnes Kalibata, President of AGRA, issued a resounding call to action, emphasizing the need to move beyond discussions of potential and take concrete steps toward transformative change. Her message struck a chord with participants eager to witness tangible progress. She stressed, "The world is ever-changing, and as a continent, we must unite in one voice to show that Africa is actively advancing its food systems transformation."



Photograph courtesy of AGRF Secretariat/ Ministry of Agriculture - Tanzania

3. Inclusive Policy Action for Agricultural Transformation:

AGRF 2023 underscored the critical importance of inclusive policy action in driving agricultural transformation. Policies that prioritize equity and inclusion in the agricultural sector can lead to sustainable growth and improved livelihoods for all.

4. Empowering Smallholder Farmers:

Recognizing the pivotal role of smallholder farmers in agriculture, AGRF 2023 emphasized the need to empower them through increased access to resources, knowledge, and financial services. This empowerment is essential for achieving food security and reducing poverty.

5. Digital Innovation for Agricultural Development:

The digital revolution is reshaping agriculture by providing tools for data-driven decision-making, market access, and financial inclusion. Harnessing digital innovation is key to unlocking the sector's full potential.

6. Climate Resilience in Agriculture:

Given the challenges posed by climate change, AGRF 2023 stressed the imperative of implementing climate-smart agricultural practices and technologies to mitigate the impact of changing weather patterns.

7. Private Sector Engagement:

The private sector emerged as a crucial partner in agricultural development. Public-private partnerships and investments can drive innovation, value chain development, and job creation in the agriculture sector.

8. Youth and Women Empowerment:

Engaging youth and women in agriculture is not only a matter of equity but also essential for the sector's future. AGRF 2023 emphasized the need to create opportunities, provide training, and promote gender equality to harness the potential of these demographic groups. Involving Women and Youth: As we move forward, it is imperative to actively involve women and youth in our efforts. They play a pivotal role in driving the transformation of food systems. Their inclusion is not only a matter of equity but is central to ensuring the robustness of Africa's food systems.

9. Advancing Sustainable Food Systems:

AGRF 2023 emphasized the global priority of advancing sustainable food systems. This included a focus on reducing post-harvest losses, enhancing nutritional outcomes, and advocating for responsible agricultural practices to guarantee food security.



10. A Collective Commitment to Eradicate Poverty and Hunger:

A critical consensus emerged at the forum that called for a collective commitment to combat poverty and hunger, recognized as the most formidable adversaries to our food systems. Only through unified, concerted efforts can we effectively overcome these challenges and envision a future where food security is a reality for all.

11. Continental Collaboration:

Collaboration among African nations is pivotal for addressing shared challenges and realizing the potential of agriculture as a driver of economic growth. AGRF 2023 promoted continental cooperation to advance agricultural transformation.

12. Investment in Research and Development:

Recognizing that research and development are at the heart of agricultural innovation, AGRF 2023 called for increased investment in agricultural research to develop solutions tailored to Africa's unique needs.

13. Monitoring and Evaluation:

Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential for tracking progress and ensuring accountability in agricultural development efforts. AGRF 2023 stressed the importance of data-driven decision-making.

Transformative Funding Successes at AGRF 2023: Paving the Way for African Food Systems

During the African Food Systems Forum, we witnessed remarkable instances of successful fundraising for the implementation of various food systems initiatives. For example, 25 investor companies have expressed their commitment to invest in Ethiopia. Rwanda, on the other hand, managed to secure an impressive \$300 million in funding, while Tanzania secured substantial financial support for its ambitious BBT program from the World Bank, IFAD, and AGRA, among others. These developments showcase the substantial business opportunities emerging from AGRF 2023 and underline the positive momentum toward transformative change in African food systems.

Emerging Opportunities at AGRF 2023

AGRF 2023 unveiled a spectrum of emerging opportunities, extending beyond those initially highlighted. In addition to the existing areas, discussions and dialogues brought forth new dimensions for investment and progress:

1. Empowering Farmer Organizations through Financing

- *Innovative Funding Models:* The forum explored innovative funding models, including public-private partnerships and impact investing, to strengthen the financial foundation of farmer organizations.

2. Boosting Smallholder Productivity

- *Technology Adoption:* AGRF 2023 emphasized the role of technology adoption, such as precision farming and IoT applications, in enhancing the productivity of smallholder farmers.

3. Fostering an Enabling Trade Environment

- *Cross-Border Trade:* In addition to policy support, the forum highlighted the significance of facilitating cross-border trade to expand market access for agricultural products.

4. Enhancing Business Development Services for SMEs

- *Capacity Building Initiatives:* Building on the SME focus, AGRF 2023 explored capacity-building initiatives to equip small and medium-sized enterprises with the skills and knowledge needed for growth.

5. Expanding Opportunities in Irrigation and Seed Production

- *Irrigation Investment:* Recognizing the pivotal role of irrigation in bolstering crop yields, the forum delved into investment opportunities in sustainable irrigation practices and technologies.

- *Digital Financial Inclusion:* Discussions also touched upon the potential of digital financial inclusion to empower farmers with better access to financial resources.

- *Market Linkages:* Creating robust market linkages for smallholders was identified as a key driver for increased productivity and income generation.

- *Sustainable Supply Chains:* The discussions extended to sustainable supply chain development, ensuring that products reach markets efficiently while adhering to environmental and ethical standards.

- *Innovative Financing for SMEs:* Innovative financing solutions, such as venture capital and impact investment, were also addressed to fuel the growth of SMEs in the agricultural sector.

- *Seed Sector Advancements:* Discussions highlighted the need for advancements in seed production and distribution, encouraging investments in research and development.

These emerging opportunities underscored the dynamic nature of AGRF 2023, where new ideas and strategies continuously unfolded, reinforcing the commitment to driving positive change in African food systems.

Tanzania's Readiness for Investment

Under the visionary leadership of President Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania has demonstrated a strong commitment to welcoming investments in critical agricultural sectors. Her Excellency's proactive approach to addressing agricultural challenges has resulted in several initiatives aimed at creating an attractive investment climate:

1. **Policy Reforms:** Tanzania has initiated extensive policy reforms aimed at streamlining regulations and lowering entry barriers for investors in the agriculture sector. This dedication to fostering a more business-friendly environment is pivotal in attracting investments. The adoption and implementation of a blueprint for regulatory frameworks represent significant steps toward enhancing the overall business climate.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** Significant investments in infrastructure, notably in irrigation systems and transportation networks, have taken precedence. These initiatives not only boost the efficiency of the agricultural value chain but also foster sustainable practices. Notably, the development of the Mwalimu Nyerere Hydroelectric Power Project promises to provide a more reliable source of electricity, crucial for supporting industrial activities. Additionally, the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) is poised to revolutionize the transportation of goods and services within the country while establishing vital connections with neighboring nations like Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and many others. Lastly, the revived airline, "Air Tanzania," is poised and ready to connect investors to various destinations.
3. **Public-Private Partnerships:** The Tanzanian government actively engages with private sector stakeholders to cultivate partnerships that will drive agricultural transformation. These collaborations leverage the strengths of both sectors to maximize impact. An illustrative example is the partnership between the Tanzanian government and a prominent agribusiness company, which has resulted in the establishment of modern agro-processing facilities. These facilities not only create jobs but also enhance the value chain for agricultural produce, benefiting both farmers and consumers. Such initiatives showcase the power of public-private partnerships in advancing the agricultural sector.



Conclusion

The 2023 AGRF, hosted in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, emerged as a pivotal event that not only emphasized the urgency of transforming Africa's food systems but also created unprecedented business opportunities for investors. The central messages of urgency, action, and prioritizing food systems resonated strongly with participants. Tanzania's readiness to welcome investments under President Samia Suluhu Hassan's visionary leadership offers promise that the continent is on the right path, and Tanzania calls for robust investment across sectors to reach its long-term vision of feeding the world.

As we reflect on this transformative event, it is evident that Africa is poised for a remarkable journey toward achieving food security, sustainability, and economic growth by bridging the agricultural funding gap and fostering innovation in its agricultural sector. The Africa Food Systems Forum has become a beacon of hope for a continent striving to feed its growing population and secure its future.

