AUDA-NEPAD
AFRICAN UNION DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Beyond Policies and Institutions

Continental Ambitions, Gaps, and Opportunities for Operationalising the Food, Trade, Climate, and Infrastructure Nexus in Africa

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#TheAfricaWeWant
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Index

List of abbreviations

AAPCM	Africa Action Plan on Carbon Markets
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB	African Development Bank
APRM	Africa Peer Review Mechanism
ARBE	Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission (note: explicitly referred to as an AU institution/department)
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency
BIAT	Boosting Intra-Africa Trade
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CAAPs	Common African Agro-Parks
EPZs	Export Processing Zones
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
GAFSP	Global Agriculture and Food Security Program
GHG	Greenhouse gas
ICT	Information and communications technology
NAIPs	National Agriculture Investment Plans
NAPs	National Adaptation Plans
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NPCA	NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency
PAPs	Priority Action Plans
PIDA	Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa
PISP	PIDA Implementation Support Project
RAIPs	Regional Agricultural Investment Plans
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
SAATM	Single African Air Transport Market
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
SOFI	State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World
SPS	Sanitary and phytosanitary
TBT	Technical Barriers to Trade
WEFE	Water-energy-food-ecosystem

Introduction

Africa possesses immense potential to achieve food security for its growing population and significantly contribute to the global food system, owing to its vast arable land, abundant resources and youthful demographic. However, the continent grapples with numerous challenges that hinder agricultural productivity and leave millions food-insecure.

This dire state is highlighted by the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025 (SOFI 2025) report, revealing that *approximately 59% of the African population experiences moderate or severe food insecurity – more than double the global average of 28%*.

Furthermore, over 20% of Africans suffer from undernourishment, with projections indicating that by 2030, nearly 60% of the world's 512-million chronically undernourished people will reside in Africa (FAO et al, 2025).

Several interconnected factors contribute to Africa's dissatisfactory agricultural production and food security indicators. Low yields and unsustainable practices plague African agriculture. Reliance on traditional farming methods and limited access to quality inputs keep yields below global averages.

Simultaneously, over-cultivation, soil degradation and deforestation contribute to declining productivity, creating a vicious cycle of land depletion driven by immediate food and income needs. Climate change exacerbates these issues through irregular rainfall, protracted droughts and rising temperatures, which also increase pest infestations (IPCC, 2022).

The majority of African farmers, dependent on rain-fed systems, lack the resources to invest in adaptive measures such as irrigation or climate-resilient crops, thereby increasing their vulnerability.

Additionally, inefficiencies throughout the agricultural value chain, partly due to logistics and infrastructure deficiencies, contribute to structurally weak food systems.

The continent's significant reliance on food imports highlights the structural vulnerabilities of its food system.

Africa's dependence on food imports increased from 39% between 1985 and 2000 to 47% between 2016 and 2023, despite overall per capita food supplies becoming more stable (Gustafson, 2025). Despite the challenges, the continent remains optimistic about strengthening its agricultural sector and improving its food security, with initiatives being implemented to address these issues.

Sustainable food systems are needed to produce, transform and distribute food to consumers from agricultural production, supply chains to storage, transportation and retail. One suggestion to achieve this is to strengthen the nexus between food security, climate, infrastructure development and trade, which will be key to meeting the continent's ambitions for agrifood systems transformation.

Agenda 2063 frames Africa's sustainable development around the interconnectedness of sectors such as food systems, climate resilience, infrastructure and trade, emphasising that integrated solutions are essential to achieving its ambitions. Its first aspiration – "A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" – prioritises economic transformation through industrialisation, value addition, diversification, modernised agriculture and climate-resilient communities, while Aspiration 2 calls for a politically united continent supported by world-class, cross-border infrastructure.

Although the First Ten Year Implementation Plan recorded progress in initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), the review highlighted weaknesses in institutionalising Agenda 2063 at national and regional levels, inadequate and unsustainable financing and limited engagement of non-state actors, including the private sector and the diaspora.

These lessons inform the Second Ten Year Implementation Plan, which identifies key enablers – coordination, partnerships, financing, monitoring and learning systems, technology and capacity development – reinforcing the need for a nexus approach that recognises the interdependence of food security, climate resilience, infrastructure and trade.

Ultimately, integrated and aligned continental policies are critical for realising Agenda 2063's goals, as they ease mobility across borders, expand markets and investment opportunities, ensure efficient use of shared infrastructure, and demonstrate that progress in one sector often enables or depends on progress in others.

This paper builds upon existing studies looking at the nexus of food and climate led by Dr Ibrahim Mayaki, the African Union Special Envoy for Food Systems, and calling for more alignment in continental policies and strategies and better coordination among AU institutions, regional organisations and national governments towards achieving agrifood systems transformations.

The study was undertaken following a broad desk literature review, which was supplemented by interviews with experts working on food systems, climate change, trade and infrastructure.

Mapping of continental policies and strategies

This section maps the continental policies Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), Africa Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy, AfCFTA and the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), existing investment plans and key institutions with a mandate to ensure effective implementation.

2.1 Agriculture and food security

2.1.1 Policies and strategies

Since 2003, the African Union's CAADP has strategically prioritised agriculture as a key driver for sustainable and equitable economic development. *The foundational goals of CAADP, outlined in the Maputo Declaration, set ambitious targets*, including allocating 10% of national budgets to agriculture and achieving a 6% annual agricultural growth rate. Building on these aspirations, African Union Member States further expanded their commitment with the Malabo Declaration in 2014.

This declaration included seven commitments, which aimed to, among other things, triple intra-African agricultural trade by 2025 through the establishment of the AfCFTA (Gustafson, 2025). However, according to the Fourth CAADP Biennial Review, no African country was on track to fully achieve the seven Malabo commitments, with progress being slow on commitments relating to agricultural investment, and the reduction of hunger and poverty through agriculture (AU, 2024).

The Kampala CAADP Declaration on Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems in Africa, and the associated CAADP Strategy and Action Plan (2026-2035), signify the continent's renewed framework for transforming its agrifood sector, indicating a transition from agriculture-driven growth to a more comprehensive agrifood systems approach.
With implementations set to start in 2026, the new CAADP strategy and action plan's emphasis is on building resilient agrifood systems and enhancing investment, productivity, inclusivity, climate adaptation and regional trade.

The strategy integrates economic, social and environmental dimensions to enhance food security, improve nutrition and promote agricultural sustainability. This builds upon the political commitment made in Africa's Common Position on Food Systems, where leaders pledged to realign agro-industrial models, reform policies, unlock public-private investment and called for analytical support for data-driven financing that empowers the most vulnerable in food systems (AUC & AUDA-NEPAD, 2021). The Common Position presented Africa's game-changing solutions, including calling for the alignment of national strategies to the AfCFTA, the development of agro-industrial clusters and regional agricultural value chains that focus on value addition in integrated markets (AUC & AUDA-NEPAD, 2021).

By shifting from an agriculture-led to an agrifood systems approach, the Kampala Declaration recognises that sustainable transformation requires addressing challenges across the entire value chain – from production and processing to trade and consumption. This transition calls for policies that respond to the diverse needs of farmers, integrating both smallholders and commercial producers into an inclusive framework that promotes productivity, sustainability and equity. Learning from past challenges identified in the biannual reviews, governance, inclusivity and accountability are integral to CAADP's implementation framework achieving its transformative goals.

Implementation framework achieving its transformative goals. The Declaration positions inclusivity and innovation as core drivers of Africa's agrifood systems transformation by advocating for at least 30% youth representation in agrifood value chains and governance structures (Omamo, 2025). The Declaration also emphasises the creation of climate-resilient and green jobs, particularly for youth, women and vulnerable populations, through initiatives in climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy and carbon markets.

The Kampala Declaration represents a shift towards greater policy alignment in agrifood systems and their nexus with climate and trade, a move that was lauded by several interviewed stakeholders. The Declaration acknowledges the significant effects of climate change on agriculture and food systems, particularly on vulnerable populations, and emphasises the necessity for innovative responses that ensure access to safe, affordable and nutritious food. Despite being minimal historical contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, African countries are highly vulnerable to climate change, experiencing severe ecological, economic and social consequences (Fonjong et al, 2024; Gunaratne et al, 2025). The Declaration underlines the urgent need to enhance the resilience of Africa's agrifood systems through comprehensive adaptation strategies that address vulnerability to climate change, economic shocks and other systemic stressors, showing stronger efforts to link food and climate interventions at the policy level.

The Kampala Declaration highlights trade and regional integration as central drivers of agrifood system transformation. The AfCFTA and related regional initiatives are recognised as key mechanisms for unlocking market access, fostering value addition, and enhancing food and nutrition security. Strategic investments in regional value chains, post-harvest infrastructure and trade corridors are identified as critical to boosting intra-African trade and strengthening resilience against global supply disruptions. Furthermore, the enhancement of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards and the adoption of One Health protocols are regarded as critical for safeguarding human, animal and environmental health, while ensuring compliance with international trade requirements. This food safety focus complements the AU's SPS Policy Framework for Africa – a component of CAADP – which mentions the need to enhance capacity of AfCFTA Secretariat and relevant AU technical offices to coordinate the collaboration of Member States and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in SPS matters, including information exchange and sharing. Discussions are also ongoing for the establishment of the Africa Food Safety Agency, tasked with coordinating and harmonising food safety policies and regulations, while providing for centralised risk assessment capacity and a food safety data hub (Ayalew, 2025; interviews, 2025).

2.1.2 Investment plans

About US$76-billion annually is estimated to be needed until 2030 to transform African food systems (IDTFAA, 2023). The Fourth CAADP Biennial Review highlights an ongoing investment gap in agriculture, noting that many Member States have not met the target of allocating at least 10% of total public expenditure to the sector (AU, 2024). Although some countries claim to meet the 10% threshold, their expenditures include items that are not directly linked to food systems or the transformation of agriculture through a sound integrated plan (Ighobor, 2023; interviews, 2025).

To close the investment gap, the new CAADP strategy aims to improve both the quality and quantity of public and private investment. Key levers for mobilising investment outlined in the strategy include increasing and improving public financing, leveraging private sector capital, creating more attractive, bankable initiatives, unlocking blended finance and de-risking investments, harnessing continental and global capital flows including engagement with the African diaspora, and improving governance, accountability and capacities.

The Kampala Declaration commits to mobilising a total of $100-billion in public and private sector investment in African agrifood systems by 2035, while ensuring that at least 10% of annual public expenditure is allocated to agrifood systems and that at least 15% of agrifood GDP is reinvested annually into the sector (AU, 2023). Furthermore, the strategy recognises National Agriculture Investment Plans (NAIPs) and Regional Agricultural Investment Plans (RAIPs) as fundamental to implementing the CAADP agenda at the national and regional levels. It emphasises their continued importance and calls for their revision and strengthening to align with the new agrifood systems approach. This aligns with the strategy's central principle of domesticating the CAADP strategy, ensuring that continental goals are translated into concrete national and regional actions. The commitments by AU Member States and RECs to integrate the Kampala Declaration into their national and regional investment plans by 2028, and embed the CAADP Biennial Review process within national agriculture joint sector reviews by 2030, are thus steps in the right direction.

2.2 Climate change (and environment)

2.2.1 Policies and strategies

The AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032), approved in February 2022, outlines priorities and mobilises support for climate action. It endorses African commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, promoting low-emission growth consistent with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C objective. This strategy is informed by Member States' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), national adaptation plans and long-term decarbonisation goals, and encourages integrating continental policies across sectors (Chevallier, 2022). The strategy identifies four main strategic intervention axes: strengthening policy and governance, adopting pathways towards transformative climate-resilient development, enhancing the means of implementation and leveraging regional flagship initiatives.

The strategy articulates a comprehensive framework for strengthening the resilience of African communities, ecosystems and economies through coordinated regional adaptation efforts. It situates resilience-building within the broader objectives of equitable and sustainable development, recognising that poverty eradication and climate adaptation are mutually reinforcing goals. By emphasising regional cooperation, the strategy acknowledges the transboundary nature of climate risks and the need for collective action across African states. It further identifies the transformation of key sectors – including agriculture and food systems, water resources, energy, infrastructure and transport – as essential to achieving long-term climate resilience and economic stability. Importantly, the strategy highlights the value of local and indigenous knowledge systems and calls for inclusive safety nets to ensure that the benefits of the green transition are broadly shared, thereby preventing deepening inequalities in the process of sustainable transformation.

Other continental climate-change related strategies include the African Green Minerals Strategy, adopted in February 2025, which addresses the global demand for green minerals (Kitaw, 2025) and aims to shift Africa from raw mineral export to value addition, beneficiation, industrialisation, job creation and regional development (AU, 2024). Additionally, the Africa Action Plan on Carbon Markets (AAPCM), endorsed in February 2025, seeks to establish a continental framework for African countries to participate effectively in carbon markets as part of their low-carbon transition (AU, 2025).

African leaders are demonstrating increased commitment to climate change. The second Africa Climate Summit, in Ethiopia in September 2025, resulted in the Addis Ababa Declaration, positioning Africa as a renewable energy hub and calling for equitable, grant-based international climate financing. The first summit in Kenya (2023) had produced the Nairobi Declaration, urging global action to reform financial systems and mobilise climate finance (Adeniyi, 2023). Following the second summit, the AU announced plans for a coalition of mineral-producing nations to manage global demand for critical minerals (Semafor, 2025).

African nations are progressively prioritising adaptation and global mitigation efforts. Policy responses increasingly focus on building resilience at local, national and regional levels and implementing green transition pathways. At the same time, global food systems contribute significantly to the climate crisis, accounting for one-third of global GHG emissions (Crippa et al, 2021), necessitating a balance between policies aimed at food production versus reducing the effects of climate change arising from such production.

In previous years, explicit linkages between climate and resilient infrastructure had been lacking (interviews, 2025). However, the Continental Policy on Climate Resilient and Smart Infrastructure, which was adopted in 2024, aims to ensure that Africa's infrastructure investments are climate-proof, adaptable and ustainable (AUC, 2024). The policy aims to strengthen Africa's ability to withstand climate impacts while promoting economic growth and regional integration by prioritising the development of resilient energy, transport, water and ICT infrastructure (AUC, 2024).

2.2.2 Investment plans

The economic cost of climate change in Africa is substantial. Adaptation costs alone are estimated at US$70-billion annually, likely a significant underestimate.

Without intervention, climate impacts could reduce Africa's GDP by up to 20% by 2050 and 64-80% by 2100 (CPI & GCA, 2025). Up to 118-million extremely poor individuals could be exposed to severe floods, droughts and extreme heat if adequate response measures are not implemented (WMO, 2024). Yet Africa is struggling to access climate finance, and to deliver sustainable and transformative responses to climate-change impacts at scale (AU, 2022).

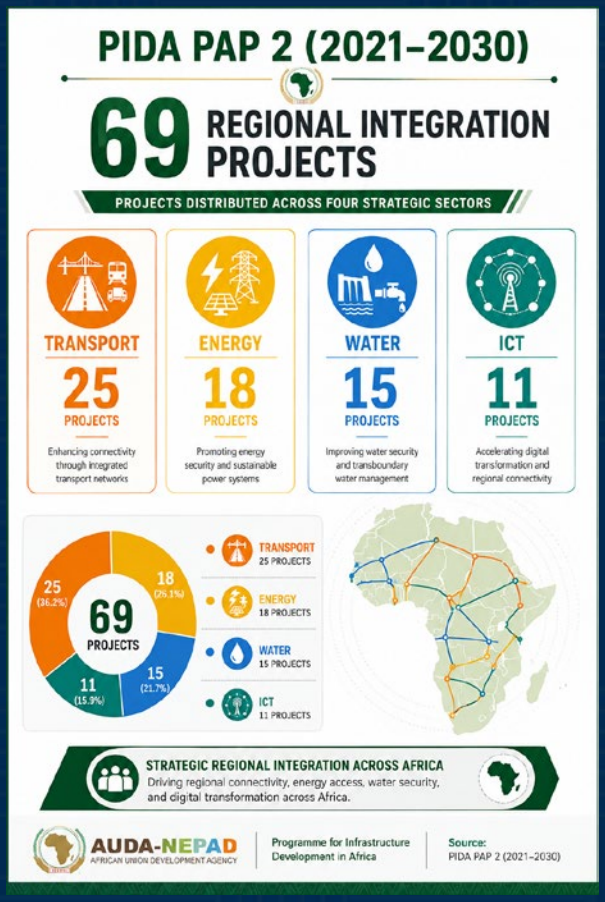
At the national level, African nations use Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) to plan and report on climate action. In terms of progress, while almost all African countries have submitted NDCs (whether for the first time or an update) (CPI, 2022; CPI, 2024), only 22 had submitted NAPs by September 2025 (UN Climate Change, 2025). Importantly, many NDCs and NAPs face challenges, including implementation shortfalls, lack of costing, incoherence with other sectors, insufficient mainstreaming in national planning and budgets, capacity gaps and inadequate monitoring (FAO, 2022; Nowak et al, 2024; UNDP, 2025; OECD & UNDP, 2025).

2.3 Infrastructure

2.3.1 Policies and strategies

The 2012 PIDA provides a common framework for more integrated transport, energy, ICT and trans-boundary water networks to boost trade, spark growth and create jobs. PIDA's Priority Action Plans (PAPs) have been instrumental in fast-tracking regional priority projects. Review of the PIDA PAP 1 (2012-2020) showed some progress in pooling and channelling funding to help set up numerous One-Stop Border Posts, upgrade ports, build cross-border roads and lay fibre-optic cables across the continent (AUDA-NEPAD, 2023; Byiers & Staeger, 2021).

Yet, sustainably financing infrastructure development remains a significant hurdle, with an estimated investment of US$360-billion required to implement all PIDA projects by 2040. Underdeveloped infrastructure continues to be a binding constraint to economic growth, and unreliable and costly infrastructure is stalling growth on the continent (Arbouch & Bourhriba, 2020). The need for trade-enhancing infrastructure, for example efficient transit corridors spanning several countries, is immense.



The Continental Aviation Infrastructure Gap Analysis revealed that Africa needs between US$25-billion to US$30-billion over the next decade to close critical aviation infrastructure gaps. AUDA-NEPAD's Integrated Corridor Approach has been instrumental in the conceptualisation of grand projects such as the Trans-African Highway Network and the East African Railway Master Plan.

PIDA PAP 2 (2021-2030) comprises 69 regional integration projects across four strategic sectors: 25 in transport, 18 in energy, 15 in water and 11 in information and communications technology (ICT) (AUDA-NEPAD, 2023; Semela, 2025). It is conceived as a more realistic package of infrastructure projects with the approval of 69 out of the original 220 projects proposed, in comparison to PIDA PAP 1. The reduced number of projects, relative to PIDA PAP 1, reflects a deliberate strategic realignment informed by lessons learned from the initial phase. This shift prioritises enhanced project implementability and the complete realisation of the PIDA PAP 2 portfolio. An addition is the introduction of the Integrated Corridor Approach as the conceptual framework for PIDA PAP 2. The approach envisions corridors combining multiple sectors (transport, energy, water and ICT), rather than a focus on separate isolated infrastructure, thereby maximising synergies and delivering more cross-sectoral benefits. PIDA emphasises both hard infrastructure (physical networks) and soft components, such as policy harmonisation and creating an enabling environment for private participation.

However, the persistent challenges noted for PIDA implementation frequently revolve around these soft aspects: governance issues, a lack of capacity for project preparation and limited involvement of the private sector. (AU, n.d.)

2.3.2 Investment plans

The PIDA PAP 2 Financing Strategy notes that the "CAPEX of the selected projects amounts to US$160.8bn, averaging a required amount of annual infrastructure commitments of US$16bn over 10 years, 60% higher than the yearly average of financing commitments secured during PIDA PAP 1 (US$10bn over 8 years)". In addition, the costs associated with project preparation and implementation, as well as with project operation and maintenance, have to be factored in.

Given the substantial estimated annual financing requirement of US$16.1-billion, AUDA-NEPAD is actively pursuing a sustainable financial strategy focused on maximising private capital mobilisation and engagement with development finance institutions. The accelerated deployment of blended finance instruments and tailored public-private partnership models would facilitate the attraction of long-term infrastructure investment (Semela, 2025).

In addition, investments have been made towards institutional support and capacity building through the PIDA Implementation Support Project (PISP), a US$7-million initiative funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB) (AUDA-NEPAD, n.d.). The PISP has contributed to strengthening the technical and institutional capacity of both AUDA-NEPAD and the AUC, ensuring robust continental governance and project execution oversight.

In October 2025, during the Third Financing Summit for Africa's Infrastructure Development, the AUC announced an ambitious US$30-billion investment plan to modernise the continent's aviation infrastructure under SAATM (AUC, 2025). This is a welcome announcement given that more than 50% of Africa's airports lack sufficient cargo infrastructure, which obstructs the optimised movement of goods and results in delays, increased handling times and potential damage to perishable goods (*Aviation Week*, 2025).

2.4 Trade

2.4.1 Policies and strategies

The AfCFTA has made much progress since the Agreement for its creation was signed in March 2018 and it legally entered into force in May 2019, with trade officially commencing under the AfCFTA on 1 January 2021. At present, 50 countries have ratified the AfCFTA Agreement, signifying political will. Progress has been made in operationalising the five supporting "operational instruments", namely the Rules of Origin, the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System, an online mechanism for monitoring Non-Tariff Barriers, the African Trade Observatory for trade information, and the AfCFTA e-Tariff Book for managing tariff concessions.

While primarily a trade agreement, the AfCFTA's success is intrinsically linked to elements of trade-related infrastructure, the free movement of persons and various digital economy frameworks (e.g. the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa and the AU's Data Policy Framework). This extensive network of dependencies and explicit linkages positions the AfCFTA not merely as a trade policy, but as a critical mechanism for the continent's broader development agenda and integration efforts across multiple sectors.

The AfCFTA Agreement is complementary to the AU's Action Plan for Boosting Intra-Africa Trade (BIAT) which aims to deepen Africa's market integration and significantly increase the volume of trade among African countries. BIAT focuses on seven thematic areas: trade policy reform, trade facilitation, productive capacity, trade-related infrastructure, trade finance, trade information and factor market integration. Yet significant progress in implementing BIAT remains limited, with little information available on its domestication and implementation at regional and national levels (UNECA, 2024).

The Guided Trade Initiative, launched in October 2022, serves as a "pilot phase" of the AfCFTA implementation to test the readiness of the private sector, operational, institutional, legal and trade policy environments under the AfCFTA. Although transport and logistics are key to accelerating trade flows, necessitating a strong nexus between infrastructure development and trade, analysis of the experience of participating countries noted transportation, logistics and connectivity difficulties in moving goods from the exporting to the importing country (KAS, 2023). The continent lacks critical aviation infrastructure and similarly faces challenges with underdeveloped coast-coast marine transport (Africa, 2025). Studies note that it is simpler for businesses to transport their products to a transshipment port in Asia or Europe, where they can obtain sufficient cargo bound for another African region (Maurer, Magis & Tammelleo, 2023). For example, Kenya's first shipment of batteries under the AfCFTA faced delays and took six weeks to travel from the port of Mombasa to the port of Tema, near Accra, because the shipment passed through Singapore (Maurer, Magis & Tammelleo, 2023).

The 2018 SAATM initiative aims to liberalise the African aviation industry, transforming it into a single market by deregulating air services and opening regional air markets to transnational competition. Air freight costs on the continent remain high and SAATM is designed to fully liberalise intra-African air transport by eliminating restrictions on market access, capacity and frequency, thereby significantly reducing travel costs and improving continental connectivity. *SAATM's effective implementation will provide the essential trade-infrastructure nexus required for the success of the AfCFTA*. Specifically, an open sky policy will facilitate the swift, cost-effective movement of high-value goods, services and business personnel, ensuring that the physical logistics (infrastructure) are in place to support the commercial integration (trade) goals of the AfCFTA, making the coordinated acceleration of both frameworks imperative for unlocking intra-African commerce.

2.4.2 Investment plans

Estimates from the World Economic Forum show that the four priority sectors of the AfCFTA Secretariat – automotive, agriculture and agro-processing, pharmaceuticals, and transport and logistics – have a combined worth of US$130-billion. The larger markets offered by the AfCFTA are expected to trigger investments, leading to higher productivity and value addition in the continent (Apiko et al, 2020). The AfCFTA Investment Protocol aims at increasing intra-African investment flows and sets out measures for making the investment environment more predictable.

Table 1: AU institutions on food security, climate resilience, infrastructure and trade

Sector	Core mandate	Related mandate
Food	AUC Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE)	AUDA-NEPAD technical arm, supporting Member States and RECs in domesticating CAADP
Climate resilience	ARBE's Directorate of Sustainable Environment and Blue Economy	AUDA-NEPAD
Infrastructure	AUC Infrastructure and Energy Department	AUDA-NEPAD for PIDA PAP 2
Trade	AfCFTA Secretariat	- AUC (Economic Development, Tourism, Trade, Industry, Mining) - RECs

Assessing the level of integration and policy-to-practice gaps in food, climate resilience, infrastructure and trade

3.1 Policy alignment

3.1.1 Efforts to connect the dots at the policy level ...

Agenda 2063 as an overarching framework is viewed as a political rallying point. CAADP, PIDA, the AfCFTA Agreement and the Africa Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy all refer to Agenda 2063, making it the common denominator in the move towards the continent's sustainable development. The new CAADP strategy and the Kampala Declaration's recognition of cross-sectoral linkages was lauded by various stakeholders interviewed, with a clear shift seen to integrate food-climate and food-trade linkages through the broader agrifood system approach (interviews, 2025). The CAADP strategy seeks to create synergies between itself and PIDA (with a focus on agriculture-led Infrastructure) and with the AfCFTA (trade in food) to attract coordinated public and private investment in sustainable food systems, green infrastructure and climate resilience over the next decade.

a) Food-climate nexus

There is a growing interconnectedness at the policy level between mainstreaming climate resilience into agriculture, with alignment evident between the Africa Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and CAADP. During the development of the new CAADP strategy and action plan, deliberate efforts were made, particularly in the resilience and climate change working group, to ensure alignment with the AU Climate Strategy and the Paris Agreement, resulting in detailed provisions on climate change resilience (Interviews 2025). The Climate Strategy includes key elements for strengthening the resilience of food systems and adaptation. Specifically, Axis 2 of the Climate Strategy deals with climate-smart agriculture, also bolstered by the Climate Resilient Agriculture Pillar of the AU Green Recovery Action Plan (AU 2023). Likewise, the new CAADP strategy highlights investment in developing, scaling and adopting climate-resilient and low-emission agriculture as a means to build resilient agrifood systems. Despite alignment at the policy level, analysis shows there remains a strong need to strengthen policies, capacity-building programmes, investment plans and gender-responsive frameworks on climate-smart agriculture (Ogiogio, 2022). In addition, national capacity to estimate GHG emissions in the agriculture sector must be developed across all countries, as the current heavy reliance on international consultants is unsustainable (Ogiogio, 2022).

b) Food-trade nexus

The AfCFTA promotes trade integration and market expansion, which is a significant theme within the CAADP framework, including expanding markets for smallholder farmers. One of the AfCFTA's objectives is to promote industrial development through diversification and regional value chain development, agricultural development and food security (AU, 2018). However, detailed references to food security in the AfCFTA legal instruments are limited. Although the AfCFTA Agreement lacks a dedicated chapter on agriculture, the Protocol on Trade in Goods provides critical support for sustainable agrifood systems through its Annexes on SPS Measures, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), Trade Facilitation and Transit. By improving the movement of agricultural goods, strengthening regulatory coherence and safeguarding human, animal and plant health, the AfCFTA Annexes create an enabling environment for regional value chains, efficient market access and more resilient, sustainable agrifood systems across the continent. In addition, there are moves towards more trade and food safety linkages, with the proposed establishment of the Africa Food Safety Agency.

The AfCFTA Secretariat and Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa have developed an AfCFTA Agri-Trade Action Plan, which identifies seven high-potential value chains, namely, rice, fish, palm oil, fruits, vegetables, meat and maize, which hold strong potential for job creation, food security and regional integration. This plan was one of the key topics at the September 2025 Africa Food Systems Forum, in which experts discussed how to unlock inclusive agrifood trade, including the role of corridor and infrastructure investments in attracting private capital, and the need to create an enabling environment to accelerate regional value chain development and drive the industrialisation of food production and distribution (TMA, 2025). Effective implementation of the Agri-Food Trade Action Plan requires close coordination between ministries responsible for trade and agriculture, working alongside RECs and the private sector (B&FT Online, 2025).

c) Climate-infrastructure-trade nexus

The Climate Strategy explicitly references PIDA and the AfCFTA under Axis 4, its strategic intervention to leverage regional flagship Initiatives, stressing the need to align policies at the continental level to address climate change. The Continental Policy on Climate Resilient and Smart Infrastructure's efforts to provide a framework on the development of smart and climate resilience infrastructure is a step in the right direction, but interviewees noted that implementation of this nexus is weak at present (interviews, 2025).

With regard to trade and climate change, although the AfCFTA Agreement does not have a specific chapter on climate change, Article 26 of the Investment Protocol commits Member States to promote and facilitate investments that help mitigate GHGs, adapt to climate impacts and support low-carbon technologies. States have the "inherent right … to regulate in their territories and to introduce measures in order to achieve their national public policy objectives", which include those to prevent environmental and climate change-related harm. This is bolstered by Article 25, which mandates high standards for environment, labour and consumer protection, prohibiting countries from relaxing or waiving standards and laws to attract investment (Kim W, 2025). Though the AfCFTA was earlier criticised for lacking a greening dimension, it will now integrate and host the Africa Green Industrialisation Initiative launched in 2023, embedding industrialisation within a continental framework for sustainable trade and value creation (Medinilla & Knaepen, 2025).

Similarly, the AfCFTA Agreement does not explicitly mention infrastructural development as one of its objectives. However, its preamble mentions the need to create an expanded and secure market for the goods and services of state parties through adequate infrastructure. In addition, its annexes on trade facilitation and on transit make reference to transport trade-related infrastructure for the movement of goods. The Annex on TBT calls for collaboration in relevant infrastructure that supports standards, technical regulations, metrology, accreditation and conformity assessments, while the Annex on SPS calls for collaboration in the development of infrastructure such as testing laboratories. The AfCFTA Protocol on Digital Trade calls for investment in infrastructure such as terrestrial fibre optic cables and internet exchange points, 5G to facilitate e-commerce, digital payments, cross-border data transfer and streamlined customs procedures, as key enablers of trade. The increasing move globally and within Africa towards the development of digital public infrastructure is crucial to strengthen the nexus between digital infrastructure and trade.

3.1.2 … Yet instances of misalignment in implementation persist

However, beyond policy alignment on paper, challenges persist when it comes to successful execution of a policy's objectives on the ground to achieve tangible outcomes and results. As noted by Dr Ibrahim Mayaki, the AU's Special Envoy for Food Systems, there are "many initiatives addressing food systems issues in Africa. We have some complexity in terms of initiatives and this complexity necessitates better management and coherence" (Ighobor, 2023). Despite the existence of continental policies and initiatives, intra-African food trade remains limited and significant challenges persist, including policy misalignment at the operational level, limited implementation of reforms and barriers for small-scale informal traders (Van Gass, 2025).

While the CAADP and the Climate Strategy show convergence in policy ambitions for climate-smart agriculture, more needs to be done to ensure implementation plans strengthen the nexus. NAIPs form the core of CAADP implementation, yet these plans do not sufficiently consider nor sufficiently implement adaptation to climate change, necessitating capacity building in developing climate-friendly NAIPs and applying climate-smart agricultural methods (AU, 2023).

Likewise, while AfCFTA and the CAADP both aim to promote structural transformation and inclusive growth and share an overarching commitment to competitiveness and private sector development, their specific implementation pathways diverge. *The AfCFTA's core logic centres on market-wide market integration and industrialisation through trade liberalisation*, In contrast, CAADP emphasises food security, productivity and rural development, which prioritises domestic support measures and local food systems (Omamo et al, 2025). This creates tension at the implementation level where the AfCFTA's liberalisation goals, which seek to ensure food trade and access, clash with the CAADP's emphasis on food sovereignty through self-sufficiency and local production, which sometimes leads to protectionist practices (Van Gass, 2025).

CAADP concerns with food security and sustainability are only weakly integrated into the AfCFTA Protocols. The lack of a dedicated trade and food security chapter in the AfCFTA Agreement or a specific protocol means that the food-relevant provisions are scattered across the AfCFTA Annexes and Protocols, diluting their overall coherence and enforceability. In practice, this risks uneven application across African countries, affecting the readiness of those with vulnerable agrifood systems from competing effectively in a liberalised market. Added to this is that a number of countries have included agricultural products under the exclusion lists of the AfCFTA, limiting trade in these goods. It is expedient that countries accelerate the removal of intra-African tariffs on food products, ensuring that food items are not overly classified as sensitive or excluded from trade liberalisation schedules (Van Gass, 2025).

Although PIDA covers transportation, energy and water infrastructure, which are relevant to agriculture and agrifood systems, there is a lack of systematic alignment. The challenges in aligning infrastructure and food priorities are further exacerbated by these sectors often being managed by different government departments in most African countries, leading to misaligned priorities (interviews, 2025). For instance, interviewees expressed concerns about inadequate assessment of the impact of energy-focused dam projects on irrigation and agriculture during the design phase of infrastructure projects. Studies on the water-energy-food-ecosystem (WEFE) nexus have consistently demonstrated the trade-offs among these systems. Water supply requires significant energy, while much of the region's energy production also depends on water, creating a fragile interdependence (Belhaj, 2025). Similarly, energy production is geared towards household consumption and industrial development, while energy production for food production is limited.

When it comes to trade and climate change, the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities may give rise to tensions between the promotion of industrial policy (using non-green production methods and energy) and climate change considerations.

African countries need to balance efforts to promote industrialisation and intra-African trade with the urgency of climate change (Fontagné et al, 2024). Our review of PIDA PAP 2 projects shows that infrastructure alignment is still most strongly oriented toward trade, with the programme continuing to prioritise regional connectivity through transport corridors, logistics platforms and energy interconnections that facilitate cross-border commerce. This reflects PIDA's long-standing integration mandate, where trade and transport considerations remain the dominant entry point for infrastructure development. Alignment with food security and resilience is present but more limited, mainly through water-related investments such as irrigation and multipurpose dam projects that link water infrastructure to agricultural productivity and resilience. These projects, alongside a smaller set explicitly focused on food systems, aquaculture and livestock, indicate a gradual recognition of the WEFE nexus within the portfolio. By contrast, explicit integration of climate change and resilience considerations remains relatively weak. While many PIDA PAP 2 projects contribute implicitly to climate mitigation or adaptation through renewable energy generation and water management, climate resilience is less frequently articulated as a core objective, pointing to the need for stronger climate framing and more systematic integration of resilience considerations in infrastructure planning, design and implementation.

3.2 Institutional coordination

While AU institutions have unique mandates, efforts are consistently made to improve coordination, information sharing and programme alignment. Some have formalised collaboration. For example, in 2024, the AfCFTA Secretariat and AUDA-NEPAD signed an agreement to bolster their collaboration in the implementation of the AfCFTA (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024). The NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA) and AUC-ARBE have established a joint framework for the CAADP agenda for adaptation to climate change. The project is building capacity at AUC and NPCA to support Member States in developing climate-friendly NAIPs and applying climate-smart agricultural methods (AU, 2022).

Table 1 above shows involvement of multi-AU institutions in the implementation of the four policies. Despite this, interviews revealed a lack of clear institutional coordination among the AUC departments and other AU institutions regarding the nexus. Even where some institutions are cooperating, it is often ad hoc or project-specific rather than systemic cross-department or institutional mechanisms, covering the whole food-climate-infrastructure-trade nexus. *Coordination among institutions can be challenging and political. Different institutions have their own priorities, which impacts coordination*. Interviewees noted that coordination is weakening due to a lack of technical and financial resources, leading institutions to "fear losing their space or mandate" (interviews, 2025). For instance, even when coordination mechanisms exist, interviews cited inadequate resourcing to effectively carry out coordination activities, thus hindering project implementation (e.g. missed strategic meetings due to lack of finances to cover trips). Additionally, monitoring implementation across institutions remains a challenge. Past Malabo Declaration biennial review processes showed a lack of cohesion, with weak data and monitoring deficiencies (i.e. inconsistent reporting and impact tracking).

3.3 Integrated funding and resource mobilisation

All four continental policies require substantial amounts of funding for their successful implementation. However, there is a lack of fully integrated financial framework for synergistic projects, let alone those covering the entire food-climate-infrastructure-trade nexus. Interviews raised the lack of synergy in resource mobilisation, with each institution fundraising for its core mandate, missing opportunities to jointly fundraise for more cross-cutting and nexus programmes. At times, institutions source funding for similar projects from the same donors, resulting in duplication and fragmentation.

Implementing the CAADP, PIDA, AfCFTA and the Climate Strategy at the continental, regional and national level requires considerable investment, necessitating coordination in resource mobilisation, which is lacking. There is insufficient national investment for financing targets set at continental level (e.g. for the Malabo Declaration). This shortfall is compounded by heavy reliance on external funding, which poses sustainability challenges. Africa also faces challenges in accessing climate finance, limiting its ability and capacity to streamline climate resilience initiatives including across the nexus. Africa receives less than 3% of total climate finance flows to developing countries, with only 36% earmarked for adaptation (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2025). Only 38% of African countries have climate-smart agriculture investment plans.

3.4 Infrastructure bottleneck

African economies face significant challenges due to underdeveloped or non-existent food storage, transport and trade infrastructures, resulting in high post-harvest losses and inefficient food supply chains (Onyango et al, 2025). Persistent road, rail and water infrastructure deficits are impeding trade and the development of agricultural value chains.

Inadequate food storage, transport and logistics infrastructures have caused high post-harvest losses, inefficient supply chains, health hazards and limited market access for farmers in most of Africa. Closing the infrastructure deficit is thus vital to Africa's agrifood systems transformation. The CAADP strategy considers investment in infrastructure and enhancement of regional trade as interconnected priorities. Investment in physical and digital infrastructure is viewed as critical to realising the full potential of regional trade under the AfCFTA, thus creating more competitive, resilient and integrated African agrifood systems. Improving rural infrastructure remains crucial, as well as developing cold storage and logistical infrastructure. The design and implementation of PIDA projects should take into account food-sensitive infrastructure development.

Access to technology, including early warning technology for smallholder farmers, is essential for agrifood systems transformation and building resilience (IDTFAA, 2023). Yet many innovations target big commercial farms, while smallholders face major barriers such as high costs, poor connectivity, fragmented data ecosystems and limited digital literacy (Musoni & Adeniyi, 2025). The Kampala Declaration promotes the adoption of precision agricultural technologies, including geospatial data and artificial intelligence, for real-time monitoring of crop, forage and livestock conditions. This has linkages with work being undertaken by the African Research Universities Alliance's Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Food Systems, which aims to leverage digital technologies and data science to offer solutions to the continent's complex food systems challenges. However, this ambition for data-driven agriculture contrasts with a broader deficiency in statistical information that generally hampers Africa's development and transformation. This necessitates investments in data collection infrastructure on the continent, to foster better monitoring of the implementation of CAADP objectives.

Infrastructure development and maintenance also involve governance, which faces many challenges. It is beyond the capacity and resources of individual African nations to meet all their national and regional infrastructure needs alone. Therefore, strengthening regional governance, especially with regard to cross-border or transboundary infrastructure, is crucial.

3.5 Slow domestication

The progression from the Maputo to Malabo to Kampala Declarations signifies a continuous political commitment and an evolving agricultural strategy. However, the consistent failure to meet stated goals, despite repeated strategic iterations and monitoring efforts, reveals a critical disconnect. This suggests that the issues are deeper than mere policy formulation, pointing towards fundamental challenges in implementation capacity, resource allocation or political accountability that impede the achievement of stated objectives. While many countries adopted CAADP-aligned plans, weak institutions, funding gaps and slow implementation limit progress (Omamo, 2025).

The slow pace of implementation is partly due to a lack of sustained political will and commitment, limited national ownership and capacity, weak coordination (national-continental, inter-ministerial) and lack of localised solutions, as policies are not always tailored to specific ecological, social and economic realities. A significant challenge at the national level is also the loss of institutional memory, where new political leadership does not inherit the understanding and agreements of previous administrations, leading to misalignments between political and policy priorities (interviews, 2025). Suggestions from interviews were for NAPs and NDCs to be grounded in the long-term national development plans at the country level, as the latter generally transcend administrative changes.

Countries also face challenges in harmonising policies, regulations and standards (food safety, climate-resilient infrastructure) across borders. However, *variable geometry*, a flexible integration principle, *allows countries within a regional bloc to co-operate at different speeds and depths*, accommodating diverse needs and challenges, which allows some countries to move faster on harmonisation than others.

3.6 Inclusivity aspects

Agenda 2063 and other AU strategies consistently emphasise engaging public and private sectors, civil society, women and youth in their implementation. This "whole of society" approach is deemed crucial for inclusive development. However, observations also point to limited involvement and mobilisation of private sector investments in critical initiatives such as the CAADP and PIDA PAP 2. This suggests that while the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement is recognised and articulated in policy documents, its full operationalisation often remains an aspiration rather than a consistent reality. The practical mechanisms and incentives for genuinely integrating all these diverse actors into policy design, implementation and monitoring may still be underdeveloped or inconsistently applied across the continent. Nevertheless, some efforts are being made to include civil society organisations. For example, under the CAADP, there is a clear coordination mechanism for their involvement through the non-state actors forum, where they are consulted in review processes. *One of the key actions of the CAADP strategy is to establish a private sector-led agrifood systems advisory council* that provides strategic guidance and support to governments and other stakeholders.

Putting the nexus into practice: operationalising CAAPs

4.1 CAAPs as a step to boost regional trade in agricultural commodities

The Common African Agro-Parks (CAAPs) represent a concrete, multi-sectoral initiative designed to operationalise the food, climate, infrastructure and trade nexus within Africa's broader development agenda. Emerging from the recognition that previous agricultural commitments had not achieved the intended levels of food security, the CAAPs' innovative concept seeks to sustainably industrialise agriculture through the establishment of strategic commodity zones. These zones aim to enhance value addition, promote regional and continental trade and strengthen the linkages between production, processing and market systems. By connecting key sectors, such as transport, energy and trade infrastructure, the CAAPs framework provides a practical mechanism for realising sustainable agrifood system transformation across Africa.

Initiated in 2019 under the CAADP, CAAPs were introduced to advance the goal of tripling intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services. The initiative has since been endorsed as a flagship programme of the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2024-2033) of the African Union's Agenda 2063, aligning with Aspiration 1 of Agenda 2063 to implement modern agriculture for increased productivity and production.

The ambition is to establish 10-15 CAAPs by 2035, along five common agro-industrial zones, distributed across the five AU regions. The CAAPs will be structured around a "hub and spoke" model that integrates transboundary agro-industrial hubs with decentralised rural transformation centres. The hubs will serve as centres for large-scale production, processing and trade, connected to spokes (i.e. national agro-parks and local pre-processing facilities) that aggregate smallholder farmers. This model aims to ensure inclusivity by linking farmers to value chains through access to technology, training and finance. CAAPs are envisioned as key enablers of agribusiness-led regional integration.

By promoting shared infrastructure and food corridors, the initiative seeks to create a cohesive framework for sustainable industrialisation and intra-African agricultural trade. The initiative aims to boost local processing capacity, create jobs and strengthen regional value chains, thereby positioning agribusiness as a driver of food security, employment and environmental sustainability. Progress is already under way, with the Zambia-Zimbabwe CAAP and the Côte d'Ivoire-Ghana Cocoa CAAP approved for implementation and discussions are ongoing for a Rice CAAP between Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia.

4.2 Key considerations to ensure the nexus in CAAPs

The CAAPs provide a practical platform to test the alignment of continental, regional and national policies on food security, trade, infrastructure and climate adaptation. While policy coherence remains essential, operationalising the food, climate, infrastructure and trade nexus requires moving beyond alignment toward integrated, action-oriented programmes that promote cross-sectoral investment. The CAAPs initiative exemplifies this shift by translating high-level strategies into tangible agro-industrial development along trade corridors. By leveraging continental frameworks such as the CAADP, AfCFTA/BIAT and PIDA, the initiative aims to transform logistics routes into agro-industrial value chains that enhance regional connectivity and economic competitiveness.

Given the scale of the CAAPs programme, operationalising it necessitates strategic planning and strong institutional coordination at continental, regional and national levels, with the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including those from the agricultural and other economic sectors.

At the institutional level, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) is the CAAPs Secretariat. This role is complemented by the CAAPs Steering Committee comprising FARA, AUC, AUDA, AfCFTA and Afreximbank. Capacitating the CAAPS Secretariat is key to ensuring that it possesses the organisational capacity, strategic vision and stakeholder engagement capabilities needed to drive the successful implementation of the CAAPs initiative. Although FARA has advanced the CAAPs agenda, some interviewees questioned the decision to appoint a research organisation to lead such a major flagship programme rather than an AU institution, which some opined would have led to more progress being recorded. Critics argued that a programme of this magnitude requires leadership with significant political weight to effectively coordinate continental, regional and national bodies – a role they believe an AU institution would have been better positioned to fulfil.

Collaboration with RECs is an important aspect as the CAAPs are organised along the five AU regions encompassing the eight RECs, and other trading arrangements such as Southern African Customs Union. The Zambia–Zimbabwe CAAP is an example originating from the REC level (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) and now integrated as part of the continental flagships. This origination highlights the importance of coordination at the regional and continental level around CAAPs, with some interviewees criticising the current lack of involvement of RECs. Overall the implementation of the CAAPs requires sustained political will, with some interviewees pointing to the need for stronger support by the current AUC Commissioner, who some perceived could do more to prioritise and champion the CAAPs initiative. The leadership was urged to match or exceed the level of commitment that was demonstrated by the previous leadership. Political leadership would convey high-level commitment, mobilise collective action and legitimise implementation of continental agendas across Member States and institutions.

Decisions on where to locate the CAAPs are also critical, with interviewees advocating for locations that offer comparative advantages and connections to existing infrastructure and markets, underscoring the importance of flexibility and adaptability in site selection. The design and choice of a CAAP location should consider the linkages with PIDA's existing or planned infrastructures for energy, water, ICT and transport, as well as the related key food production and consumption hubs in the region, to ensure connectivity and trade across Africa (interviews, 2025). However, *the direct linkages between CAAPs and the existing 69 PIDA PAP 2 projects are yet to be made*. The experience of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Export Processing Zones (EPZs) across Africa offers critical lessons for CAAPs design and implementation. Past successes and failures highlight the need for strong governance, transparent incentives and effective stakeholder engagement to ensure sustainable outcomes.

At the same time, CAAPs require substantial investment in transboundary, logistical and food processing infrastructure. The continent faces a lack of infrastructure for post-harvest management, leading to food wastage. Financing transboundary projects faces complexities as the individual country qualifications for debt may vary, hindering collective efforts. Interviewees also stressed that if one partner defaults on an agreement, it could jeopardise the entire arrangement.

In addition, progress on CAAPs is facing challenges in securing sufficient funding for feasibility studies and implementation, as current funds are primarily for pre-feasibility studies. The capital-intensive and long-term nature of CAAPs projects may be perceived as high-risk, yet private sector investors require "bankable" projects before committing funds, which necessitates upfront investment in project preparation (interviews, 2025).

4.3 Anchoring CAAPs along corridor development

Interviewees stressed that CAAPs must be anchored along viable corridors for economic viability foreseen to reduce logistics costs by lowering last-mile input expenses and first-mile output costs to strengthen the competitiveness of African agricultural products. Priority should be given to existing trade corridors where infrastructure can be leveraged to minimise costs and maximise impact. Within these corridors, emphasis should shift toward integrating climate-smart agriculture, improving agro-productivity and processing, and facilitating efficient market access. By drawing on these lessons and embedding CAAPs within a corridor-based approach, the initiative can deliver integrated, market-driven and climate-resilient agrifood systems that advance the goals of regional industrialisation, climate mitigation and adaptation, and food security.

The five primary AfCFTA trade corridors – Abidjan-Lagos, Northern, Central, North-South and Central Africa (Yaoundé-Brazzaville) – *provide a strategic foundation for locating CAAPs hubs and agro-industrial zones*. Anchoring CAAPs along these corridors can enable the leveraging of existing and planned infrastructure, and facilitate cross-border trade. By integrating CAAP development with corridor-based logistics, these zones can function as transboundary agro-industrial value chains, connecting multiple countries while promoting regional integration and intra-African trade.

However, successful operationalisation of CAAPs along trade corridors requires strong institutional coordination, policy alignment and cross-sectoral investment, drawing on lessons from PIDA PAP 2 projects and SEZ/EPZ experiences. Collaboration among AUDA-NEPAD, the AfCFTA Secretariat, FARA and CAADP institutions is critical to ensure that corridor infrastructure, agricultural production, climate action and trade facilitation reinforce one another. By linking hubs, rural transformation centres and corridor infrastructure, CAAPs could transform policy frameworks into concrete action, creating competitive, inclusive and climate-resilient agribusiness systems that advance Africa's food security, economic integration and industrialisation objectives.

Recommendations to enhance the integration of the nexus in implementing continental frameworks: what will it take to actualise the nexus vision in practice?

5.1 Policy and institutional integration

To actualise the nexus, the AU should establish an AU cross-sectoral policy integration task force involving relevant AUC departments, AUDA-NEPAD, the AfCFTA Secretariat, the AUC, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, etc., to enhance multi-sectoral coordination by strengthening institutional links, developing joint dashboards and joint planning between AU bodies. The Africa Team-Pamoja Initiative, launched to accelerate Agenda 2063, seems a model for joint programming. By bringing together the AUC, AUDA-NEPAD, the AfCFTA Secretariat and RECs into a single delivery mechanism, it aims to break institutional silos and could be leveraged, for example, to create joint project preparation facilities that specifically fund nexus projects (AUDA-NEPAD et al, 2025).

It is important to harmonise monitoring and evaluation frameworks related to the nexus by developing integrated indicators reflecting co-benefits that measure the extent to which targets are met. This can be bolstered by joint review mechanisms building on good examples of cross-sectional frameworks such as the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) used to track governance. The APRM uses a comprehensive set of indicators across four main areas – Democracy & Political Governance, Economic Governance & Management, Corporate Governance and Socio-Economic Development. A similar monitoring could be established to track indicators related to the food security, climate change, infrastructure and trade nexus.

With regard to governing this nexus, emphasis should be on strengthening both horizontal and vertical coordination. This requires the breaking of institutional silos by establishing integrated governance and planning structures that ensure development in one sector (e.g. energy or water) is assessed for its positive or negative impacts on other components (e.g. ensuring hydropower projects do not compromise agricultural water security). Vertical coordination through national buy-in is an important aspect of implementing the nexus. *National governments must prioritise implementing, or "domesticating", the Kampala Declaration as well as the implementation of the AfCFTA*. The CAAPs provide a test for this horizontal and vertical coordination. They test horizontal coordination by requiring neighbouring nations to synchronise trade policies and infrastructure across sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure and finance to create seamless transboundary value chains. Simultaneously, they challenge vertical coordination by requiring the trickle-down of high-level continental frameworks into practical implementation on the ground.

5.2 Finance and investment mobilisation

It is essential to link CAADP and PIDA to climate finance by positioning agriculture and infrastructure as entry points for global funds such as the Green Climate Fund and the loss and damage fund, scale climate-smart approaches and integrate climate adaptation as a cross-cutting investment priority. Opportunities lie in the use of green bonds and climate bonds. Though still nascent – at less than 1% of the global green bond market – Africa's green bond market has demonstrated incremental progress in mobilising financing while enhancing environmental impacts and social co-benefits, including reducing GHG emissions, increasing water savings and improving waste management. The AAPCM provides an opportunity to finance PIDA (corridors) through green bonds or carbon credits generated by shifting freight from road to rail, or using electric logistics. This would create a revenue stream for infrastructure that is directly linked to climate performance. However, successful use of green bonds is contingent on having an enabling environment, including regulatory and governance frameworks.

Leveraging food systems specific funds, such as the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), including a focus on mobilising funds to benefit smallholder farmers could be critical in addressing the finance shortfall. The recent funding to the AfDB in October 2025 (US$14-million) under the GAFSP, is geared towards the establishment of an Agro-Inputs Risk Sharing Facility, to incentivise local banks to extend credit to agro input suppliers. This will benefit smallholder farmers and early-stage agrifood businesses in fragile and low-income countries who struggle to access credit, insurance and investment capital due to perceived high risks, constraining their ability to meet rising food demand.

The AfCFTA Protocol on Investment could be used to push the nexus by, for example, mandating environmental impact assessments that consider future climate scenarios (not just historical data) for all major agricultural and infrastructure investments. This could guarantee the active use of the "right to regulate" to safeguard long-term national interests and enhance the coherence of climate action among countries. In addition, focus should be on accelerating infrastructure investment by prioritising funding for cross-border infrastructure, supporting intra-African food trade such as CAAPs.

Furthermore, countries should look to systematically harness the significant annual remittances (over US$100-billion) from the African Diaspora for agrifood transformation.

This can be through developing credible, innovative, secure, transparent and regulatory-compliant financial products and mechanisms for diasporic investment, such as specialised agriculture bonds or managed investment funds to systematically channel diaspora savings into high-potential agricultural value chains. Countries can establish strategic partnerships with credible, established organisations and platforms, such as African Food Changemakers (which connects entrepreneurs across 50 African countries), to vet, curate and present a portfolio of viable, transformative agrifood business opportunities to potential diaspora investors, to ensure that such investment capital targets credible ventures with maximum development impact.

5.3 Corridor development plus the nexus as a viable solution

At the continental level, the AU should embed the Integrated Corridor Approach and nexus principles (infrastructure-trade-food systems-climate resilience) into planning and implementation frameworks. This requires operationalising climate-resilient trade corridors by embedding climate-smart agriculture, food trade, agro-processing and climate-proof infrastructure within AfCFTA priority corridors. To support this shift, *the AU should conduct a systematic review of the PIDA PAP portfolio to identify and prioritise projects* that explicitly address nexus dimensions within corridor development. The findings should guide the refinement of corridor selection criteria, strengthen cross-sector coordination and ensure that future PIDA cycles elevate nexus-aligned and climate-resilient corridor projects as strategic continental priorities. The current project indeed looks at ways of synergising the fragmented food-trade-infrastructure-climate policy and investment plans and initiatives for three corridors in Africa: Lobito, Northern corridor and the Abidjan-Lagos corridor.

AUDA-NEPAD, with ECDPM in support, is available to contribute to the abovementioned improvements through dialogue, partnership brokerage and coordination processes under the current project, to help address the challenges identified and promote integrated policies and investment for food systems transformation, climate resilience, trade integration and infrastructure development.

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