

AfrONet

NEWS





Fresh off the farm - smallholder farmers relish their just-harvested maize. Photo from our library

Africa's new food plan: small farmers wary as leaders shift strategy

Kampala, Uganda

When African heads of state gathered in Kampala earlier this year to endorse a new ten-year food agenda, the tone was optimistic.

The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) - the continent's agricultural blueprint since 2003 - had been overhauled.

Gone is the narrow focus on increasing production of maize and rice. In its place is a "food systems" approach that aims to integrate climate action, nutrition, industrialization, and indigenous knowledge.

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What a wheat field in war-torn Congo teaches Africa about building organic markets

Could organic agriculture truly flourish where the front line lies barely 20 kilometres from the fields? In the shadow of Virunga National Park, a quiet experiment is proving that it can-but only if we abandon the old models. The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and the Virunga Foundation are showing that

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Lusaka to host 6th AOC as Africa's organic farming movement picks up steam

Come December 2026, all roads in Africa's organic farming world will lead to Lusaka.

Zambia's capital will host the 6th African Organic Conference (6th AOC) from the 1st to the 4th of December.

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Gone is the narrow focus on increasing production of maize and rice. In its place is a “food systems” approach that aims to integrate climate action, nutrition, industrialization, and indigenous knowledge.

“This is not just an update,” a delegate said on condition of anonymity. “This is a fundamental shift.”

But weeks after the applause faded, a more cautious conversation has emerged. For millions of smallscale farmers and agroecology advocates, the Kampala Declaration presents both an opportunity and a risk.

A changed framework

The original CAADP, adopted in Maputo in 2003, set simple targets: governments should allocate 10 percent of national budgets to agriculture and aim for six percent annual growth.

Public investment rose, and yields improved in several regions. However, critics say the framework overemphasized production, left industrial agriculture largely unchecked, and said little about environmental degradation.

The new framework, finalized in Kampala, attempts to address those gaps. It explicitly references soil health, climate adaptation, and the double burden of malnutrition – where under

nutrition and obesity coexist.

It also prioritizes local value addition, targeting 35 percent of agricultural GDP to be processed domestically rather than exporting raw commodities.

“For the first time, they are talking about food systems, not just agriculture,” said Carin Smaller, a policy analyst who has followed the process. “That means they have to talk about trade, health, consumption – and the environment.”

Missing language

But for proponents of agroecology – farming methods that work with natural systems rather than against them – the declaration contains a notable silence. The text refers to “sustainable agricultural practices” and “indigenous knowledge” but stops short of endorsing agroecology as a central paradigm. Some observers worry this leaves the door open for industrial models that have previously degraded soils and displaced smallholders.

“The language is ambiguous enough to allow anything,” said a civil society representative who attended the Kampala consultations but was unable to speak publicly.

“One government can interpret it as agroecology; another can interpret it as carbon markets and genet-

ically modified organisms. That is the risk, he hurried.”

The money question

The new framework also shifts emphasis from public spending toward “crowding in” private capital – a phrase that concerns those who have watched corporate interests play an increasing role in African agricultural policy.

What happens next?

The declaration itself is not the final word. Over the coming months, individual countries will draft national implementation plans, and the African Union’s Biennial Review will then set the indicators used to measure success.

Advocates say that is where the real contest lies.

“The battle is not over the declaration; it is over the indicators,” said Francine Picard, who has advised on the process.

“If we measure soil health, biodiversity, and farmer autonomy, we move towards agroecology. If we only measure tonnes of grain and bags of fertilizer, nothing changes.” He stresses

For now, farming communities – from Maasai herders to Ugandan organic farmers to Senegalese agroecology networks – are watching closely. The vision has shifted. Whether that shift reaches the soil and the people who till it remains an open question.



Corn field. Photo from our library

How Africa rewrote its food story, why it matters for the woman who farms the land

By Constantine Akitanda,
Dar es Salaam

It started with a promise back in 2003, in Maputo, Mozambique, when African leaders made a quiet pledge to themselves and their people: they would finally put agriculture first by allocating ten percent of national budgets to farming, with the goal of reaching six percent annual growth and creating a continent that feeds itself. They didn't hide the promise in fancy words or bury it in appendixes. They said it plainly, because the problem was plain.

Africa, blessed with land and labor, was buying food it could easily grow. Children went to bed hungry right next to fertile fields. Farmers worked the soil while governments looked away.

So the leaders gave their word, not just for a summit, but for a generation. They called it the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADAP). A dry name, but underneath it was something simple. Hope.

Twenty-two years of walking that hope

That hope has walked a long road. It has passed through villages where farmers grew more food but watched their land grow weak. It has survived droughts that laughed at

growth targets.

And earlier this year, it finally arrived in Kampala, Uganda. There, leaders gathered again - this time to admit something quietly bold: agriculture alone was never enough.

When CAADP was born, the idea was refreshingly simple. If Africa invests in farmers, farmers will feed Africa. By 2013, 45 countries had signed up. Money started moving.

In a small Tanzanian village, a woman named Mama Anna remembers those early days. "For the first time, extension officers came to us, they taught us about improved seeds. We grew more maize. For a while, we were so proud." But the pride didn't last. The rains stopped trusting the calendar. The soil grew exhausted. The maize that once filled her granary began to fail.

What Mama Anna was living through - though no one had given her the words for it - was the limit of a vision that measured success only in sacks per hectare.

Malabo and the turn toward accountability

By 2014, leaders knew they needed more. In Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, they adopted new targets: end hunger, cut poverty in half, boost trade within Africa. And for the first time, they

created a scorecard, the Biennial Review to hold themselves accountable.

For a few years, there was real energy. Countries competed for better scores. Mama Anna started hearing new words like 'value chains' and 'agri-business.' But those words didn't always reach her field.

Fertilizer got more expensive, and her son left for the city. Her family's diet, once rich with beans, millet, and greens, shrank to maize and whatever the market had left.

Then came 2023, the Biennial Review delivered hard news: no country was on track to meet the 2025 targets. Africa had the plans. It just didn't have the systems.

Kampala: a quiet revolution

By January 2025, when leaders met in Kampala, the mood had changed. The old certainties had cracked - broken by climate shocks, the pandemic, and a war in Ukraine that choked global grain supplies.

One minister stood up and said something that stuck:

"We cannot talk about agriculture without talking about health. We cannot talk about production without talking about trade. And we cannot talk about growth without talking about the soil, the water, and the climate," She noted.

That moment shaped the Kampala Declaration as a quiet revolution, sweeping

away the old slogan of 'agriculture-led growth' and replacing it with 'sustainable and resilient agrifood systems.'

For the first time, nutrition was a pillar, not an afterthought, and climate adaptation was a foundation, not a footnote, while woven through it all was a simple truth: the people at the centre, women, youth, and smallholders must not just benefit; they must lead.

Mama Anna's field today

Today, Mama Anna belongs to a women's farming cooperative and still grows maize, yet she also tends to pigeon peas and millet; she has learned to compost, and slowly, and gradually, her soil is coming back to life.

She has never read the Kampala Declaration, yet she knows its spirit perfectly: "They used to just tell us to produce more, but now they ask about what we eat, the trees we leave standing, and what our daughters want to grow.

The shift is not yet finished, and the new framework still carries risks, the push to bring in private capital could open doors for big corporations that don't share Mama Anna's gentle care for the land, and the language on sustainability is so broad that it can include industrial farming, which may not truly heal the soil.

Still, something is changing.

Over the coming months, countries will turn the Kampala Declaration into real national plans, and come 2035, the continent hopes to raise \$100 billion for its food systems. The new scorecard will track not just yields, but nutrition, resilience, and fairness.

The road ahead

For those who believe in a different kind of farming, one that feeds people, restores land, and respects the wisdom of those who have always lived on it, and the work has only just begun.

The shift is not yet finished, and the new framework still carries risks, the push to bring in private capital could open doors for big corporations that don't share Mama Anna's gentle care for the land, and the language on sustainability is so broad that it can include industrial farming, which may not truly heal the soil.

From Maputo to Kampala, the road has been long. It has bent, as roads do, toward a horizon that keeps moving. But for the first time in a generation, the map is being

drawn not just in government offices, but from the village, the farm, and the hands that truly feed Africa. The story of CAADP is not over, perhaps it is finally being written the way it was always meant to be: from the ground up.



Maize farm planted through agroecological methods. Photo from unsplash.

Ghana sets ambitious targets as agroecology gains momentum

ACCRA, Ghana

President Mahama announces 60 percent tree crop processing goal as new initiatives bring eco-innovation hubs, insect farming, and farmer service centres to rural communities

Ghana is speeding up its shift toward sustainable agriculture, and if the wave of policy announcements, research partnerships, and private sector investments in early 2026 is any indication, then this country is serious about becoming West Africa's next hub for agroecological transformation.

From mandatory tree crop cultivation for public officials to insect-based waste processing and farmer ser-

vice centres, Ghana is putting concrete plans on the table.

A target to stop exporting raw crops

In February, President John Dramani Mahama announced an ambitious goal: process at least 60 percent of Ghana's major tree crops locally every year. The target comes under a revised \$200 million Tree Crops Diversification project.

Speaking at the first ever Ghana Tree Crops Investment Summit in Accra, the President did not crumble words. "We will no longer export raw cashew, raw shea, or unprocessed rubber while importing finished products at higher prices," he said.



H.E John Dramani Mahama, The President of Ghana

Ghana sets ambitious targets as agroecology gains momentum

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Since then, the Tree Crops Development Authority has proposed a mandatory policy requiring senior public officials to own and manage at least 25 acres of tree crops suited to their ecological zones. It is a bold move aimed at leading by example.

Farmer service centres take root

On March 20, 2026, the President cut the sod for Ghana's first Farmer Services Centre in the Kwahu Afram Plains South District. The facility is designed to bring mechanization services, inputs, extension support, and market linkages all under one roof. Fifty such centres are planned

nationwide.

Research hubs and living labs

In January, the European Union funded INNOECOFOOD consortium held its 24-month coordination meeting in Accra. The project reported 96 percent completion of cage installations at Lake Volta for aquaculture trials.

INNOECOFOOD is developing four ECOHUBS across Africa, including one in Ghana, to test spirulina production, Black Soldier Fly rearing, and sustainable aquaculture systems, and Farmers are fully involved through 'living labs' real-world ex-

periments on working land.

Separately, the Galileo Project is testing climate smart agroforestry with cocoa farmers in the Bono, Ashanti, and Eastern regions. The project helps farmers tackle drought challenges using flexible shade management and rainwater harvesting.

Meanwhile, Regreening Africa Phase II was launched in January with a newly inaugurated national advisory committee. The initiative is restoring degraded landscapes using farmer managed natural regeneration and agroforestry, simple but powerful techniques that put control back in farmers' hands.

Turning waste into protein and profit

In early March 2026, an agreement was signed to build a €2.5 million insect processing facility in Accra. The partnership brings together JSO Waste and Danish firms Insectum ApS and Michael Bundgaard Holding ApS.

The plant will process 8,000 tonnes of organic waste every year, turning it into protein ingredients for aquaculture and poultry feed, as well as organic fertilizer for crop production. It is a smart model, whereby waste becomes a resource, and farmers get cheaper, local alternatives to imported feed.

From policy to impact

With farmer service centres under construction, research hubs nearing completion, and a growing focus on value addition, Ghana's sustainable agriculture agenda appears to be moving from policy statements to tangible impact on the ground.

The Tree Crops Development Authority estimates that the new initiatives could increase export earnings by up to 30 percent and create 500,000 jobs by 2030.

If those numbers hold, Ghana may not just be talking about transformation, it will be living it.



One of the cocoa farms in Ghana. (Picture from unsplash)

Editorial Notes

How does our organic vision fit into Africa's new food plan?

As we look ahead to the 6th African Organic Conference in Lusaka this December, we are really gathering to answer one question: what happened to our promise?

Back in January 2011, African heads of state adopted the Declaration on Ecological Organic Agriculture (Decision No. EX.CL/631 (XVIII)). It was a big moment. For over a decade since, we have worked tirelessly to push organic agriculture into the mainstream of CAADP, the continent's farming blueprint.

But now CAADP has been replaced by the Kampala Declaration of 2025. So we have to ask ourselves honestly: where does the EOAI fit in this new order?

Here is the good news. The Kampala Declaration talks about resilience, nutrition, and inclusive growth. That is exactly what ecological organic agriculture delivers. We are no longer a niche method tucked inside a productivity-only framework. We are now a strategic tool for achieving Africa's new food systems vision.

That is what Lusaka must be about – not just another conference, but our moment to make this alignment clear and loud. Our job is to show that scaling up organic farming is not optional; it is essential to making the Kampala Declaration work.

But let me ask a hard question. Why do so many member states still not grasp the weight of their own declaration? Why is implementation so painfully slow while farmers on the ground cry out for real support?

Our collective stance is that every government must guard this decision jealously and support AfrONet wholeheartedly, because we cannot expect it to grow on Western money alone; that responsibility is ours alone.

So let every country invest. Let every institution step up. Let us make Lusaka more than a conference, let it be the turning point, the moment we lift organic agriculture from the margins and place it at the very center of Africa's new food systems agenda. No more speeches. Let us answer with action.

“No more speeches. Let us answer with action.”

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How West Africa's organic powerhouse is writing its own rules

By AfrONet Writer

Benin, long known for conventional cotton, has quietly ignited an agricultural revolution. Now the region is watching.

As the continent prepares to converge on Lusaka this December for the 6th African Organic Conference, one West African nation is not merely preparing to attend, it is writing the blueprint others may soon follow.

Benin, long synonymous with conventional cotton production, has quietly ignited an agricultural transformation that is turning heads across the region.

By early 2026, the country's organic sector is experiencing explosive growth – driven by a strategic push toward sustainable agriculture, rising global demand for certified organic cotton, and the emergence of local, eco-friendly textile industries.

At the middle of this shift is a focused commitment: empowering smallholder farmers, particularly women, through hands-on training in agroecological practices and tangible improvements in economic returns.

The numbers speak for themselves

Organic cotton production has surged by 65 percent over the past three years. Ambitious new projects

now aim to double that output, bringing benefits to more than 9,000 smallholder farmers.

Certified organic farmers are reaping real rewards as they eliminate costly synthetic inputs and access premium prices for their harvests, experiencing increased profitability that transforms household economies.

Women step into leadership

Specific training programmes are enabling women to step into leadership roles within cotton cooperatives. For the first time in many communities, women are no longer just labourers.

They are decision-makers – sitting on cooperative boards and managing collective finances. That shift alone is reshaping rural power dynamics from the ground up.

A daring bet on local industry

Perhaps the boldest element of Benin's strategy is its refusal to remain a mere exporter of raw materials.

The government's prohibition on raw cotton exports has catalyzed the growth of a “Made in Benin” apparel industry within the Glo-Djigbé Industrial Zone (GDIZ). This policy shift aims to transform the nation into a hub for sustainable textile production

How West Africa's organic powerhouse is writing its own rules

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Organic cotton being processed in a factory in Benin as one of the ways to add value and produce a final product — one of the very important steps recently achieved in the country.

– from farm to fashion, entirely on African soil.

The GDIZ has already attracted international buyers seeking sustainably produced textiles. By controlling the entire value chain, Benin can guarantee organic integrity while capturing the value once lost when raw cotton was shipped overseas.

Beyond cotton

The revolution does not stop at cotton; more than 9,500 farmers have been trained through farmer field schools in integrated production and pest management, focusing on natural pest control, biopesticides, and soil health.

These schools operate on a simple but powerful prin-

ciple: farmers learn best from one another, sharing observations and experimenting in real time.

A professor's challenge
Prof. Simplice Davo Vodouhe, a renowned expert in ecological organic agriculture from Benin, puts the transformation into perspective.

"The 65 percent growth in organic cotton did not come from foreign miracles," he observed. "It came from training, policy commitment, and women's decision to lead in the production of the organic cotton in the country.

"The question is no longer whether organic works; the question is: why are we not all doing it?" remarked

Prof. Simplice.

The road ahead

The sector continues to seek investment to secure long-term growth. Although the foundation is solid, scaling up demands capital for infrastructure, certification, and market expansion.

To bridge this gap, both government and private sector actors are actively exploring innovative financing solutions.

Benin now offers something rare in African agricultural policy: proof that a different path is not just possible but already paying off. And as the continent turns its gaze toward Lusaka, all eyes may soon look west.

Egypt is quietly becoming an organic farming powerhouse

By Mary Androus, Cairo

For decades, when people thought of farming in Egypt, they pictured sun-scorched fields along the Nile— heavy with cotton, wheat, and citrus. That image isn't wrong. But underneath it, something quieter has been taking root.

It started with a handful of farmers turning away from synthetic chemicals to try biodynamic practices— an experiment, back then, that no one knew would work.

Today, organic agriculture in Egypt is no longer a fringe movement. It is a growing industry with its own law, its own export markets, and — perhaps most importantly— a domestic audience that is finally paying attention.

The early pioneers were not driven by dreams of big money. They truly believed in building systems that put soil health and ecological balance first. Slowly, their methods began to spread. Before long, a network of farmers, researchers, and civil society groups started to form. What united them was a simple belief: agriculture should work with nature, not against it.

As it turns out, Egypt's climate is perfect for growing medicinal plants, aromatic herbs, and specialty fruits — all of which are highly

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Organic cotton seen on one of the farms in Benin.

When ISAN Magazine became Mzizi Magazine in 2026, the change raised more than a few eyebrows across Southern Africa's agroecology community. Why fix something that wasn't broken? To find out, Constantine Akitanda sat down with Fortunate Nyakanda, Co-Editor of Mzizi Magazine, to understand the thinking behind the rebrand, and what it means for the grassroots CSOs, farmers, and practitioners who rely on the platform as a vital source of knowledge, connection, and advocacy. Excerpts:

Question: *The shift from the regional identifier ISAN to Mzizi (root) is a philosophical one. What key strategic discussions led the team to prioritise a name reflecting diverse knowledge systems over a purely geographic scope?*

Answer: The shift from ISAN to Mzizi emerged from strategic reflections on the magazine's evolving role. While ISAN reflected our origins within a regional network supported by the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa, co-founder Stefanie Swanepoel and I recognized that the stories we document—rooted in farmer practice, indigenous knowledge, and community experience—extend beyond geographic boundaries. These stories

From ISAN to Mzizi: Rooting agroecology storytelling in African soil

increasingly connect practice with policy debates and broader food systems narratives.

Mzizi, a Swahili word meaning root, was deliberately chosen in its plural form to acknowledge the many knowledge systems, cultures, and relationships that sustain African food systems. The change represents an evolution, not merely a rebrand: it clarifies our purpose to ground food systems conversations in land, lived experience, and intergenerational knowledge while strengthening narrative coherence across organic and agroecology networks in Southern Africa and beyond.

Q: *How does the Mzizi rebrand practically change the way you source and validate farmer-led and indigenous knowledge? Will this make it easier for grassroots CSOs with limited resources to contribute to and utilize the platform?*

Answer: The Mzizi rebrand does not change how we source and validate knowledge - it deepens our commitment to it. We now source stories more deliberately through civil society networks, farmer organizations, and community practitioners on the ground. Validation blends



Ms. Fortunate Nyakanda, Mzizi Magazine Co-Editor

farmer testimony, practitioner experience, and relevant research—ensuring credibility without stripping away authenticity.

For grassroots CSOs with limited resources, yes, it becomes easier. Our partnership model offers editorial support and narrative mentoring, allowing organizations without communications budgets to contribute. We help shape raw field experience into publishable stories and amplify them across networks. This ensures that resource constraints do not silence community knowledge, and that grassroots actors both contribute to and benefit from shared learning across the agroecology movement.

Q: *For cash-strapped CSOs, access and affordability are critical. How will Mzizi's new distribution model ensure that practitioners in the field can easily access the magazine as a practical, low-cost training and advocacy tool?*

Answer: For cash-strapped CSOs, accessibility is central to Mzizi's distribution model. The magazine remains primarily digital and open-access, and free of charge. Each issue is web- and mobile-friendly, with a downloadable PDF for offline sharing via email, WhatsApp, and partner newsletters. This recognizes that many practitioners rely on mobile phones and

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intermittent connectivity. Distribution also relies on network-based sharing. By circulating through civil society platforms, regional knowledge hubs, and partner organisations, Mzizi reaches thousands of readers across Africa and beyond—far beyond any single mailing list. Stories live on their own webpages and can be shared across multiple platforms.

Crucially, the magazine is designed as a reusable resource. Articles and themed editions can be downloaded, printed locally, or woven into training sessions, advocacy materials, and community learning. This ensures that even resource-limited organisations can use Mzizi

as a practical tool for learning, communication, and movement-building.

Q: Your vision now spans “across Africa.” How does this rebranding strategically position Mzizi to facilitate the cross-pollination of agroecological practices between Southern Africa and other regions, helping to scale the movement continent-wide?

Answer: The name Mzizi does more than signal roots. It opens doors. By shedding a purely regional identifier, the magazine now creates space for cross-continental dialogue. Stories, innovations and lessons from Southern Africa can travel north, and those from West, East and

Central Africa can travel south.

Mzizi facilitates this exchange through thematic editions and knowledge partnerships. Research, programme experiences and grassroots innovations are translated into accessible narratives. Valuable lessons are no longer confined to one geographical area.

The magazine becomes a bridge, connecting farmers, CSOs, researchers and enterprises across regions. By curating grounded stories from diverse contexts, Mzizi strengthens shared understanding. And helps scale agroecology, from the roots up, across the continent.

Q: How does operating under the Mycelium Media Colab Cooperative change the partnership model for CSOs? Does this structure offer our organisations more collaborative ownership and flexibility compared to a traditional publishing model?

Answer: Mzizi is not published by a traditional media house. It is published by a cooperative. Mycelium Media Colab brings together more than 60 regenerative storytellers based across Africa. Their skills span videography, podcasting, participatory theatre and mobile journalism. Many are also trainers, building storytelling capacity on the ground.

For CSOs, this changes the partnership model entirely. Any organisation can submit stories for editorial consideration at no cost. But for those seeking deeper collaboration, Mzizi offers story packages that directly employ our network of 42 regional journalists and 60 cooperative members. Ten per cent of every payment flows back into the cooperative, training youth in multimedia storytelling.

And the door is open. Communications professionals working in agroecology and organics are welcome to join the network. So are practitioners in the field. Membership is subsidized for those unable to pay, granting access to a collaborative platform, funding opportunities, and gatherings throughout the year.

This is not a publisher-client relationship. It is a shared ecosystem, a model built on ownership, not extraction. And it represents a quiet but radical shift in who tells the story of Africa's food systems, and how.



Egypt is quietly becoming an organic farming powerhouse

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sought after in European and global markets. That gave the organic movement a practical foothold.

But accessing those markets meant meeting tough international standards. Egyptian producers had to professionalize their certification processes, tighten their practices, and build real credibility. The export market became a powerful engine for growth.

In recent years, that momentum has been matched by institutional support like training programmes and farmer-to-farmer networks have helped more producers make the transition to organic farming.

Then came Egypt's Organic Agriculture Law (No. 12 of 2020), a genuine game-changer that created a national framework for production, certification, and labeling aimed at protecting consumers, improving transparency, and strengthening Egypt's standing abroad.

Things are also shifting at home - Egyptian consumers, especially those in cities, are increasingly interested in healthy diets and sustainable farming, and organic products that used to be nearly impossible to find are now showing up on supermarket shelves.

Of course, challenges remain - from expensive certification and unreliable supply chains for organic inputs to the simple truth that change does not happen overnight.

Still, when you look at the big picture, Egypt has a lot going for it - a favorable climate, deep agricultural expertise, and a legal framework that finally supports organic farming, and as the pieces come together, what began decades ago as a handful of pioneers has quietly become a significant part of Egypt's agricultural future, which is no small thing.



Organic farming training in Egypt for farmers. Photo from online.

Ethiopia's smallholder farmers lead the way as country embraces sustainable agriculture

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

For decades, Ethiopia's smallholder farmers have watched their land grow tired. Degraded soils, unpredictable rains, and shrinking harvests have made life harder than it needs to be. But now, there is a new sense of hope.

The Ethiopian government has officially adopted a long term plan to help farmers work with nature, not against it.

The National Agroecology Strategy for Food System Transformation (2026–2040) was approved on March 14, after a full year of careful preparation led by the Ministry of Agriculture. Farmers, researchers, and agricultural experts from across the country came together to shape it.

This strategy is not just another policy document sitting on a shelf, it is a practical roadmap for ordinary farmers who want to restore their land, grow more food, and protect their families from the effects of climate change.

It focuses on low cost, nature-friendly farming methods that reduce the need for expensive chemical inputs.

Alongside this, the government also launched the National Agroforestry Development Strategy late last year. This second plan encourages farmers to plant trees alongside their crops and livestock.

Trees bring back lost nutrients to the soil, provide shade, and offer extra income from fruits, timber, and firewood. Together, both strategies aim to heal Ethiopia's degraded landscapes while putting more food on the table.

In February, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations held a workshop in Addis Ababa with the Ministry of Agriculture, and the goal was simple: help align Ethiopia's policies and investments so that real change reaches the farmer in the field.

Then, in April 2026, a new initiative called EcoVeg4Africa will begin testing an innovative farming method in Ethiopia and Kenya, commonly as Vegetable Integrated Push-Pull Technology, this nature based solution was developed together with farmers themselves in what the organizers call a living labs.

It helps keep pests away and improves soil health without using dangerous pesticides, and farmers are not just being told what to do; they are actively participating in finding solutions that work for them. Another promising idea gaining traction is the “Grow to Sell” approach. At a recent international workshop in Addis Ababa, experts and farmers discussed how moving from growing just enough to eat toward growing for the market can change lives.

For organic farmers who have struggled to find reliable buyers, this shift offers real hope. A new sesame hulling plant recently opened in the capital, is creating a ready market for one of Ethiopia’s most important export crops.

Ethiopia has had laws supporting organic farming since 2006, when Proclamation No. 488/2006 established the country’s inspection and certification system, but what is happening now feels different. Back then, organic farming was a niche idea for a small group of enthusiasts, but today, agroecology is becoming a national movement.

For millions of Ethiopian smallholder farmers, the message is deeply personal: sustainable farming is no longer a side option or an experiment, it is the heart of a new vision for the country’s future.



Smallholder farmers proudly display vegetables harvested from their ecological farming gardens, a growing success of urban agriculture in Ethiopia.

What a wheat field in war-torn Congo teaches Africa about building organic markets

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Monitoring every grain, from soil to harvest, Augustin Muyisa, Monitoring Program, tracks wheat

for organic farming to succeed, production cannot stand alone; it must be built from the ground up alongside processing, markets, and genuine local ownership.

Across Africa's organic sector, growing chemical-free crops is not the hardest part. Farmers have shown time and again that they can produce organic food. The real challenge begins after the harvest, and it is this challenge that decides whether farmers move forward or stay stuck in poverty.

For too long, Africa's organic story has been tied to exports, while certified cocoa goes to Switzerland, Coffee heads to Germany and as well, Avocados are shipped to France.

This trend has left domestic markets weak, forcing farmers to grow food that their own neighbors might want yet offering them no easy way to sell it, leaving them disconnected from the very people who could value their produce most.

The Virunga Foundation, which manages Africa's oldest national park, learned this the hard way. A local production system based on a broad network of local producers has existed for many years. Wheat cultivation on these high plateaus is not new; a value chain was already in place nearly a century ago, as evidenced by the ruins of an old mill in Lubero.

Yet production remained stubbornly low, threatening

the entire enterprise. Despite the infrastructure in place and a clear market waiting, farmers could not produce enough wheat to make the operation viable. The pieces were assembled, but the engine would not start.

That is where the FiBL partnership, launched in April 2025, took a different path. Instead of starting with certification or export ambitions, the project focused on what farmers simply call making the work viable.

After closely assessing cultivation practices and growth parameters, a list of simple yet impacting improvement has been set, and put in practice on several pilot plots. For example, a locally built weeding tool co-designed by FiBL has cut weeding time by a factor of ten. Small-scale mechanization is reducing back-breaking labor but also production costs. Green manure crops are being tested to boost soil fertility without chemical inputs.

These are not glamorous interventions, but they tackle the fundamental barrier facing organic farmers across Africa: the perception that organic methods are more labor-intensive and less productive. The Virunga Foundation did not wait for farmers to grow wheat before building the mill and biscuit line.

Yet across Africa, organic projects routinely invest heavily in farmer training while neglecting the value chain infrastructure that makes markets accessible. Farmers invest in organic practices but sell into conventional markets without capturing any price premium.

Second, organic development is inseparable from processing. Virunga targets the entire chain from seed to biscuit. Across Africa, this shift is gaining momentum. In Côte d'Ivoire, cocoa is being transformed into juice, bio-char, and animal feed.

In Southern Africa, farmers are discovering that processing moringa and baobab unlocks markets that raw produce cannot access. Third, local ownership matters. The Virunga Foundation is locally rooted, with revenue from agricultural projects directly funding conservation, including the 700 rangers who protect the national park. This is not a donor-driven intervention but a self-sustaining operation.

The project also offers a corrective to the organic movement's preoccupation with certification. For domestic markets, the form of certification matters less than the existence of a functioning value chain.

Organic practices also aim at reducing dependence on imported inputs, subject to high tensions and volatility under the current global conditions. Reduced tillage

and locally-adapted cover crops play a major role in improving soil fertility, thus breaking through the yield ceiling of very low productivity.

Virunga's wheat is not exported to Europe; it is milled locally and baked into biscuits for Congolese consumers.

The project is still in its early stages, a second phase, planned for 2026-2028, will extend its focus to potatoes and beans while continuing work on wheat, reaching 2,000 farmers.

For organic actors across Africa, the lesson is clear. Organic agriculture cannot succeed as a purely production-side intervention.

It demands simultaneous investment in processing infrastructure, market access, and local ownership. It requires a shift from certification as an end in itself to value chains as the engine of farmer prosperity.

In eastern Congo, where conflict is never far away, this is not theory. It is the difference between a field of wheat that becomes a biscuit on a local shelf and a field that remains just a field. The Virunga Foundation and FiBL have shown that organic agriculture can work even in the most challenging circumstances. The question is whether the rest of the continent will learn what they are teaching.

Lusaka to host 6th AOC as Africa's organic farming movement picks up steam

Continues from page 2

"That's a big deal for the country's organic agriculture sector, which has been growing quietly but steadily," said Mushimbwe Chitalu, OPPAZ's Executive Director, and Vice President of the African Organic Network (AfrONet) in an interview with AfrONet News recently.

The theme of the conference is: "Building up resilient agri-food systems and ensuring the right to food in Africa through organic farming."

He pointed out that across the continent, farmers are feeling the weight of climate change, and food insecurity remains a real challenge, adding that many are now turning to homegrown, nature-friendly solutions, and this event will shine a spotlight on what's working.

"Just like in past conferences, the program will be divided into four connected tracks: Farmers, Policy, Research, and Market & Trade," affirmed Chitalu.

Why four? Because the organizers know that real change doesn't happen in one corner alone, you need farmers sharing what they face on the ground, policy-makers listening, researchers testing new ideas, and markets opening up, in this manner each piece matters a lot, added Chitalu.

He emphasized that a special Farmers' Track will give

smallholders, the real backbone of African agriculture, space to speak, compare notes, and tackle practical problems. The idea is simple: don't talk about farmers without farmers in the room.

The African Organic Conference first began in Kampala, Uganda, back in 2009. Since then, it has grown into one of the continent's major gatherings, regularly pulling in over 300 participants.

The 2026 edition is expected to attract an even wider mix: government officials, international NGOs, African Union and UN agencies, researchers, and private sector players, all coming together under one roof.

Zambia got the nod to host after Kenya stepped back from the race. The decision was confirmed during the 5th African Organic Conference in Kigali, Rwanda, in December 2023.

On the final day of the four-day event, the African Organic Network (AfrONet) will hold its General Assembly. That session matters - there will be elections for a new Governing Board, which will shape where the movement heads next.

For many, the return to Lusaka feels like a homecoming. It's a reminder that Zambia remains committed to an agricultural path that is both organic and resilient.

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The Kampala gathering that put organic farming on Africa's new menu

Kampala, Uganda

The little girl stood at the podium and said something that stopped the room cold. "Food does not come from the fridge."

She was eight years old. Her name was Lily Diana Quinz, and she had been introduced as Little Miss Uganda, but in that moment, she became something else: a reminder of how far the adults had drifted from the land.

It was day one of the 4th National Organic Week in Kampala, and more than 200 delegates including farmers, exporters, and policymakers, had gathered to talk about policy frameworks and trade integration.

In a room packed with experts, an eight-year-old girl had done what no one else could, she brought everyone back to the beginning and shouted, "Food does not come from the fridge - it comes from the ground! For a moment, the 200 delegates sat in silence. Not because they had forgotten, but because they rarely allowed themselves to say it so plainly.

A new continental framework

Earlier this year, African leaders adopted the Kampala Declaration, a new continental framework that shifts the focus from simply growing more food to building resilient food

systems.

For organic advocates, it felt like both an opening and a question: would the new agenda create space for farming that restores soil and puts control back in farmers' hands?

Over four days at Hotel Africana, the answer began to take shape. Organic leaders from Nigeria, Tunisia, Zambia, Madagascar, and Kenya shared stories of local markets growing stronger. They spoke of young people training in agroecology not as a fallback, but as a calling.

"Africa has the potential to become the world's leading supplier of organic products," Chariton Namuwoza, CEO of NOGAMU and president of the African Organic Network (AfriONet),

told the gathering. Across the room, heads nodded.

Hard truths and celebrations

There was hard talk too — about European Union regulations, financing gaps, and the infrastructure needed to trade within Africa. But there was also celebration. Awards were handed to farmers and entrepreneurs who had built businesses without sacrificing their principles.

On the final day, students from a local school toured the exhibition stalls, asking questions and testing products. By then, Little Miss Uganda was busy learning from farmers who knew exactly where food comes from.

"We are not waiting for permission," one panelist stated. "We are showing what works."

The entire room nodded, not in polite agreement, but in the quiet recognition of people who had spent years proving a truth that policy had been slow to embrace. They had built markets, trained farmers, restored soils, and raised children who knew the difference between a seed and a package. They had not waited for a declaration to tell them their work mattered.

A return to the beginning
On the final day, someone asked the little girl who had opened the week what she had learned. She offered no grand summary, only a return to where it all began.

"Food does not come from the fridge," Lily said again, this time with a smile. "It comes from farmers....and I want to be one."



The organic agriculture products already on display at a market in Uganda

Letter to the Editor

The missing topic of the conference: Soil

Why the closing synthesis became the ‘Dodoma Soil Health Declaration’

By Rainer Detering
Founder, Zum-Zum
International Ltd., DSM

I am a practitioner in regenerative agriculture and soil health, and at the Fourth National Ecological Organic Agriculture Conference in Dodoma, I was invited to present the closing synthesis.

The official theme was ‘Agroecology for Sustainable Food Systems,’ yet soil health was not explicitly mentioned as a central topic. However, over two days, a reality became clear. Speakers discussed agroecology, seeds, nutrition, climate resilience, and policy, but many of the challenges they raised, such as declining productivity, vulnerability to drought, and rising costs, are actually symptoms of soil degradation.

Modern agriculture asks: “What does the plant need?” Agroecology asks: “What does the soil need?” The difference is profound. Soil is a living ecosystem that drives nutrient cycling, water retention, and plant health.

In my view, agroecology will only become mainstream if it works economically for farmers, not through premium prices alone, but by reducing costs through restored natural functions.

That is why the closing synthesis became what we now call the “Dodoma Soil Health Declaration.” Sustainable food systems do not begin with markets. They do not begin with inputs. They begin simply and profoundly with living soil.

Rainer Detering
Founder, Zum-Zum International Ltd.
Dar es Salaam



Organic farming gains ground in Burundi as farmers double their yields

BUJUMBURA, Burundi

Smallholder farmers who tried bio-fertilizers made from human urine are now harvesting more than double what they used to get from conventional chemicals.

The results have been so striking that people are now calling for a nationwide shift to agroecological methods.

Back in January this year, a high-level workshop in Bujumbura brought together researchers, government officials, and farmers to assess three years of work under the CANALLS project – short for Agroecological Living Landscapes.

Around the table sat the Institute of Agronomic Sciences of Burundi (ISABU), the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA CAPAD), the University of Burundi, NGOs, traders, and local authorities.

They all came to answer just one question – is this working? – and the evidence was found in two ‘living laboratories,’ one in Bujumbura and another in Giheta, where farmers have been experimenting with alternatives to synthetic inputs.

As president of the GIRA UMWETE DUKORE cooperative in Maramvya, Odette Ntirampeba knows the numbers better than anyone – on a 1,000 square metre plot treated with hu-

man urine as bio-fertilizer and neem as bio-pesticide, she harvested 700 kilograms of maize kernels.

Right next to it, an identical plot treated with mineral fertilizers and chemical pesticides gave her just 300 kilograms.

“The difference is clear, she said, smiling at the memory of her harvest, adding that we save money by using what’s right around us – and honestly, our fields have never produced like this before.”

In Giheta, farmers supported by Naturland are taking a different approach – organic shade-grown coffee intercropped with beans, soybeans, and peas to keep the soil healthy.

They have received certi-

fication from the Burundi Organic Agriculture Movement (BOAM), and that certification opens doors to premium organic markets where prices are higher, she pointed out.

BOAM’s role as the national certifying body was a major topic at the workshop. People see it as central to scaling up these efforts – turning informal good practices into a real, verifiable economic asset.

By the end of the meeting, participants had a clear message for the government and development partners: take CANALLS nationwide. They pointed to better yields, healthier soils, and less dependence on expensive imports.

“These methods work,” one

cooperative representative said. “If we want to increase national agricultural production sustainably, this is another option we should explore.”

The CANALLS project set out to reduce the use of mineral fertilizers and chemical pesticides. The results from the ground now suggest something bigger: for Burundi’s smallholder farmers, organic agriculture is not just a nice idea. It is viable. And for many, it is already more profitable.

“The difference is clear, she said, smiling at the memory of her harvest, adding that we save money by using what’s right around us – and honestly, our fields have never produced like this before.”



Mr. Adrian Sibomana, CEO of the Burundi Organic Agriculture Movement, pictured in a rice field in Burundi.

Zanzibar's organic revolution takes root as farmers embrace agroecology

Zanzibar

For a long time, Zanzibar's farmers have battled declining soil fertility, rising input costs, and the creeping impacts of climate change. Now, a quiet but determined movement is reshaping the Isles' agricultural landscape, one organic farm at a time.

Among the key actors in this significant transformation is the Zanzibar Organic Initiative (ZOI), a stakeholder platform bringing together farmers, researchers, and policymakers under a shared vision: to make the Isles a hub for organic agriculture and agroecology.

"Zanzibar is making great strides in embedding organic principles into our agricultural policies," said Agnes Bweye, a representative of the Practical Permaculture Institute Zanzibar (PPIZ), which hosts the ZOI secretariat, in an interview with the AfrONet Newsletter recently.

"What we are witnessing is not just a shift in farming techniques, but a fundamental reimagining of how we relate to our land, our food, and our future," she added.

The movement has gained significant momentum since Dr. Hussein Mwinyi, the President of Zanzibar and Chairperson of the Revolutionary Council,

made a bold pledge to steer the Isles towards becoming 100 per cent organic. Since then, his administration has backed this vision with policy support, creating an enabling environment for organic agriculture to flourish.

"President Mwinyi's commitment has opened doors for dialogue between farmers and decision-makers," Ms. Bweye said. "We are now seeing that political will is being translated into concrete action."

For smallholder farmers like Amina Suleiman, a

mother of four from Unguja, the shift has been life-changing. Once dependent on expensive synthetic fertilisers that yielded diminishing returns, she now practices permaculture and intercropping—techniques she learned through training provided by PPIZ, a key ZOI partner.

"My soil is healthier, my harvests are more reliable, and I no longer worry about debt for farm inputs," Ms Suleiman said, gesturing to her flourishing vegetable garden.

The Zanzibar Joint Programme, a multi-agency initiative supported by the United Nations and funded by Norway, is targeting over 530,000 beneficiaries with climate-resilient agricultural interventions.

Meanwhile, the AgroKilimo Project, backed by the French government, has established six national agroecology centres, with PPIZ serving as a key hub.

Through the ZanzAdapt project, nearly 300 women-led farmer groups have been formed, planting over 750,000 trees and restoring degraded landscapes while securing their families' food and income.

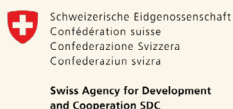


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