

RWANDA IS EMBRACING A FOOD SYSTEMS APPROACH TO IMPROVED PROSPERITY

Agriculture as an entry-point and the evolving policy landscape

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Key Messages

- While Rwanda has made notable progress in recent decades on areas linked to improved prosperity such as growth in agricultural production and poverty reduction, rates of malnutrition remain a public health concern, particularly among vulnerable groups like young children.
- Seeing inclusive agricultural growth as a lever to improve livelihoods and prosperity, Rwanda has led Africa's nations in terms of advancing commitments under the 2014 Malabo Declaration through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The Rwandan government has renewed commitments to this process in the Kampala Declaration¹, which places greater emphasis on food systems.
- The nation's newest Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation (PSTA 5) aligns with broader plans for national transformation and the country's vision 2050. It contains a strong approach to food systems which provides political emphasis on the role of food systems in accelerating nutrition gains.
- Emphasis on budgeting needs, as well as monitoring, evaluating, and learning from plan implementation is expected to help to ensure coherence, responsiveness, and accountability.

¹ Kampala CAADP Declaration on Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems in Africa



Introduction

The need to transform food systems in every country of the world, for health of people and planet, is well-recognised².

Rwanda's achievements over the past two decades in several critical areas tied to food systems, such as increases in food security, agricultural growth, economic development, and gender equality have not translated to rapid improvements in nutrition³. Some forms of malnutrition remain a major concern (**Box A**).

While nutrition has been a relatively minor concern of the Ministry of Agriculture in the past, it is now being mainstreamed and integrated across the ministry's different strategic pillars⁴. Today, Rwanda's Ministry of Agriculture is the strongest champion of transforming Rwanda's food systems to deliver on improved nutrition and other goals.

This brief focuses on the ongoing contribution of agricultural policy in Rwanda's approach to food system transformation. It includes a brief summary of Rwanda's progress towards the international goals set by the Malabo Declaration, as well as a discussion of the nation's newest Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation, which includes strong food-systems, nutrition, and environmental considerations.



Food systems

comprise all processes, infrastructure, and actors involved in all aspects of feeding a population. This includes agricultural production, regulations, and laws related to food, imports, processing, the inputs needed for food production and processing, distribution, marketing, sale, consumption, and disposal of food.

Food systems shape:

1. Whether people have physical or economic access to nutritious and safe food;
2. How food is promoted, labelled, and advertised; and
3. How acceptable and desirable food is.

Box A: Malnutrition in Rwanda

Child stunting is a measure of faltering growth in children under five years of age, associated with chronic malnutrition, driven by health, care, and food concerns. Though stunting has improved, from over half in 2005 to around a third in 2019/20, it remains high (**Figure A1**). More progress is needed to meet goals set out in the World Health Assembly, the Malabo process (more detail in **Box B**), and in the Sustainable Development Goals. While levels of child stunting have been falling, other forms of malnutrition, like overweight and obesity among adults (**Figure A2**), have worsened.

Figure A1: Stunting rates for children under five in Rwanda over time

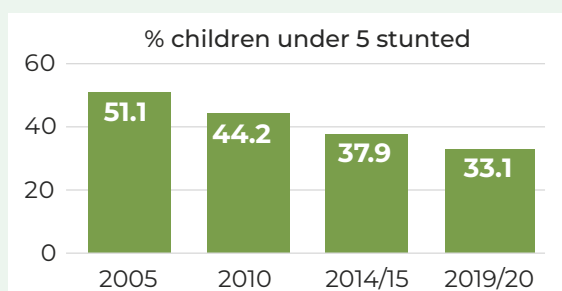
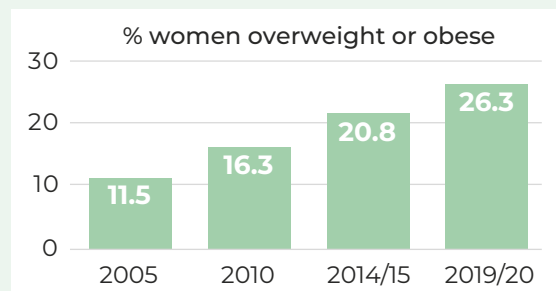


Figure A2: Overweight and obesity rates in Rwanda over time



² See for instance FAO. 2024. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2024 – Value-driven transformation of agrifood systems*. Rome.

³ <https://www.foodsystemsdashboard.org/countries/rwa>

⁴ The ministry's strategic pillars for agricultural transformation are: Enabling Environment and Responsive Institutions, Technological Upgrading and Skills Development, Productivity and Sustainability, and Inclusive Markets and Off-Farm Opportunities.

Agriculture as an entry point to food systems transformation

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of Rwanda's economy and a vital driver of the country's socioeconomic transformation. Approximately 69% of households are engaged in agricultural activities, with the agri-food system providing employment to an estimated 400,000 individuals.⁵ Beyond its economic contributions, the sector plays a pivotal role in advancing social equity, supporting women's economic empowerment, and creating meaningful opportunities for youth employment. In 2023, the sector contributed 26% to Rwanda's GDP and generated approximately 34% of the country's export revenues.⁷ As Rwanda proceeds toward upper middle-income status by 2035 and high-income status by 2050, the agricultural sector is expected to remain central to both economic expansion and poverty alleviation. The recent Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture (PSTA 5) underscores this vision by prioritizing the diversification and intensification of food production, laying the groundwork for long-term national health, nutrition, and resilience.⁸

“Between 2001 and 2017, agriculture accounted for nearly two-thirds of the poverty reduction achieved nationally, underscoring its significance in improving livelihoods.”⁶

Rwanda's latest scorecard of performance on implementation of the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods (see **Box B**) shows it is on track on over half of the commitment categories (13 of 24)⁹. This level of progress towards the commitment category places Rwanda among the better performers. The latest Malabo scorecard still urges continued and intensified efforts to:

- Address malnutrition especially among young children under the age of 5 years
- Address the challenge of poor dietary diversity among women¹⁰



5 NISR, Fifth Population and Housing Census, 2022

6 [Government of Rwanda, 2020, Vision 2050](#). In this period, the poverty rate reduced from 58.9% to 38.2% according to the National Household Survey, EICV 1-5

7 NISR, National Accounts 2023

8 [The fifth Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation \(PSTA 5\)](#)

9 See Scorecard pp 67 of 3rd CAADP Biennial. Review Report 2015-2021. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/41573-doc-ENGLISH_3rd_CAADP_Biennial_Review_Report_final.pdf

10 Statistics on dietary diversity are often collected in health surveys for women of reproductive age given their vulnerability, but the problem of low dietary diversity likely extends beyond this group.

11 The Seven Malabo Commitments <https://caadp.org/>

Box B: The Malabo Declaration – and post-Malabo CAADP Agenda

The Malabo Declaration, adopted by African Union (AU) heads of state and government in 2014, set out several goals aiming to improve livelihoods and achieve shared prosperity through agricultural growth and transformation following a Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The seven commitments¹¹ adopted by African leaders under the AU to strengthen CAADP's implementation are:

1. Recommitment to the principles and values of the CAADP process
2. Enhancing investment finance in agriculture
3. Ending hunger by 2025
4. Reduce poverty by half, by 2025, through inclusive agricultural growth and transformation
5. Boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services
6. Enhancing resilience of livelihoods and production systems to climate variability and other shocks
7. Strengthening mutual accountability to actions and results.

Rwanda has demonstrated commendable progress in implementing the Malabo commitments. In 2017, Rwanda achieved a score of 6.1 out of 10, indicating it was on track. By 2019, this score improved to 7.2, surpassing the benchmark of 6.6 set by the African Union Commission (AUC) to qualify as being on track.¹² In the 4th CAADP Biennial Review assessment, Rwanda emerged as the leading performer with a score of 8.07.¹³

The adoption of the new CAADP Strategy and Kampala CAADP Declaration by African Heads of State in 2025 represents a paradigm shift, moving from an agricultural transformation focus to the goal of developing high-performing agri-food systems. Fifty-five AU member states including Rwanda, set forth six commitments that should transform and strengthen the agri-food system on the continent. They are:

1. Intensify Sustainable Food Production, Agro-Industrialization, and Trade
2. Boost Investment and Financing for Accelerated Agrifood Systems Transformation
3. Ensure Food and Nutrition Security
4. Advancing Inclusivity and Equitable Livelihoods
5. Building Resilient Agrifood Systems
6. Strengthening Agrifood Systems Governance¹⁴

Note: The full Malabo Declaration is available for download at <https://www.nepad.org/caadp/publication/malabo-declaration-accelerated-agricultural-growth>

¹² [Rwanda on good track in implementing the continental comprehensive Africa agriculture development programme](#)

¹³ [Fourth Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme \(CAADP\) Biennial Review \(fourth BR\) Report 2015-2023](#)

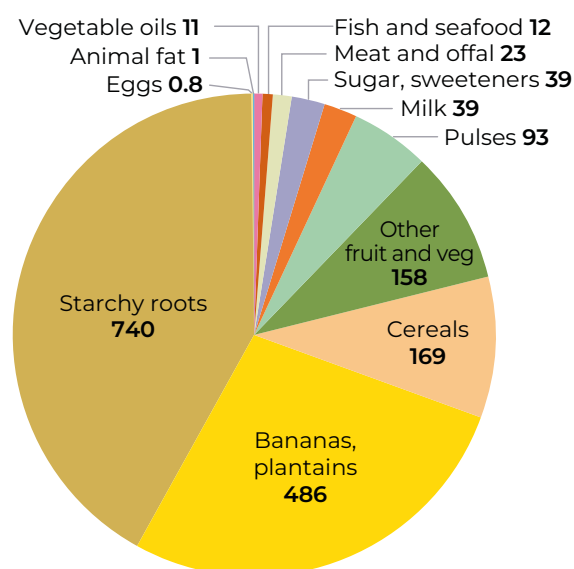
¹⁴ Kampala CAADP Declaration on Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems in Africa Draft | November 25, 2024

Agriculture as an entry point to food systems transformation

Availability and access to diverse food must be a cornerstone of a healthy nation, but healthy diets in Rwanda remain highly inaccessible, in part because they are expensive¹⁵. A lack of diversity of food and unhealthy diets have been shown to contribute to malnutrition, lower resilience to infectious disease, diet-related non-communicable diseases like heart disease, some forms of cancer, stroke etc, and children's inability to focus on learning in school¹⁶.

Figure 1 illustrates a food supply dominated by staples – with over three quarters accounted for by carbohydrate-rich cereals, roots, bananas, and plantains (**Figure 1**). The remaining (less than a quarter) is made up of more micronutrient- and protein-rich items. While staple foods are essential, in a more optimised food supply they would not dominate to this extent.

Figure 1: Food supply per person (g/capita/day), Rwanda, 2021



The ongoing contribution of agricultural policy

Since 2000, the Government of Rwanda, through the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI), has been shaping policies and programs to address agricultural sector challenges. These include: the National Agricultural Policy; the 6-year Strategic Plan of Agricultural Transformation (PSTA) I, II, III, and IV to address the specific challenges related to the low productivity and the limited use of agricultural inputs; and the Crop Intensification Program (CIP) launched in 2007.

This latter had four major components:

- 1) distribution of improved inputs,
- 2) land use consolidation,
- 3) proximity extension services, and
- 4) post-harvest handling and storage,



Agri-food sector performance in the PSTA 4 period (2018-2024)

Rwanda's agricultural sector has performed well, yet ongoing challenges continue to impact productivity, food security, and market stability. In recent years, the country has experienced shocks which have affected food availability, accessibility, and affordability. The COVID-19 pandemic reduced household incomes and placed strain on food systems¹⁷. Additionally, food inflation reached a peak of 65% in November 2022, driven by a mix of factors including reduced global supplies of grains and fertilizers, regional food export restrictions, and climate variability undermining domestic production.¹⁸

Between 2018 and 2023, agriculture's gross value added (GVA) grew at an average annual rate of 3.1%, compared to 6.5% for overall GDP. Despite this modest growth, the sector served as a buffer during times of economic downturn. Notably, in 2020, while national GDP contracted by 3.4%, agriculture GVA grew by 1%, absorbing approximately 450,000 additional workers during the height of the pandemic, underscoring

¹⁵ The Food Systems Dashboard reports that healthy diets are unaffordable for 86% of Rwanda's population (Data from Food Systems Dashboard, 2020. This means 86% of the population live in households that couldn't afford the lowest cost set of foods to meet requirements set out in food-based dietary guidelines, even if spending 52% of their income on food)

¹⁶ See for example <https://www.fao.org/school-food/en/> or <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/SOFA2024-8-trillion-in-annual-hidden-health-costs/en>

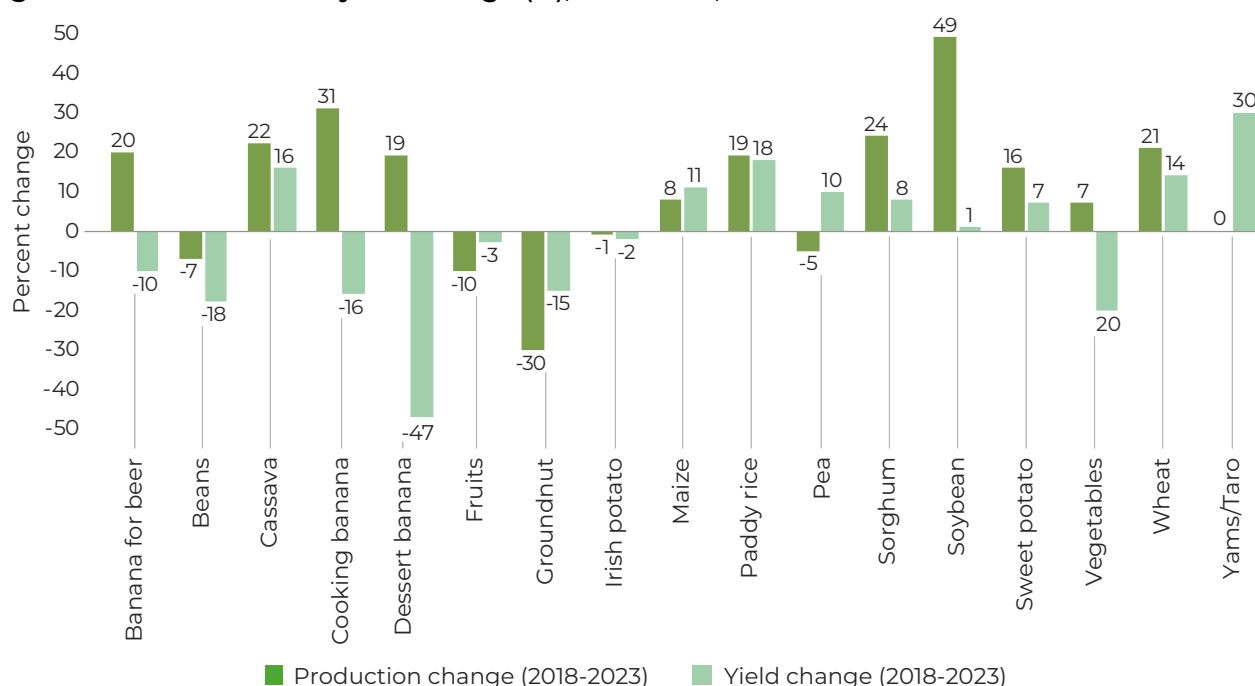
¹⁷ NISR, CFSVA 2021

¹⁸ Xinshen Diao, Paul Dorosh, James Thurlow, David Spielman, Jenny Smart, Gilberthe Benimana, Serge Mugabo, and Gracie Rosenbach, 2022, Impacts of the Ukraine and Global Crises on Poverty and Food Security, IFPRI Country Brief 5

its importance as a source of economic and social stability.¹⁹ Within the agriculture sector food crops account for 62% of production. However, annual growth in food crop output slowed to 2% between 2018 and 2023, compared to 4.5% over the period 2003 – 2023. In contrast, the livestock sub-sector showed faster growth since 2018, reflecting the impact of targeted investments and support programs.²⁰

While the Crop Intensification Programme (CIP) initially contributed to notable yield improvements, its impact has plateaued since 2013.²¹ During the PSTA 4 period (2018–2023), food crop production gains were largely driven by a 10% increase in harvested area rather than yield improvements. Performance varied, with some crops recording yield increases, and others declines, owing to disease, drought, and limited use of quality inputs (**Figure 2**).²² Uptake of good agricultural practices did however improve well during PSTA 4. The proportion of farmers using inorganic fertilizers increased from 22% to 56%, with average application rates rising from 32 kg/ha to 70 kg/ha. Use of organic fertilizers rose from 44% to 86%, while adoption of improved seeds and pesticides increased from 9% to 29% and 17% to 33%, respectively.²³ Nonetheless, rising global input costs from 2022 made affordability a challenge.²⁴ In response, the government adjusted fertilizer subsidies and pricing mechanisms to shield farmers from market volatility.²⁵ Climate resilience measures also expanded during this period. Integrated soil, land, and water management efforts intensified, with 92% of farmers employing anti-erosion practices by 2023, up from 68% in 2018.²⁶ The area under radical terraces increased from around 110,000 ha to around 138,000 ha, while irrigated land expanded to 72,000 ha. The share of farmers using irrigation doubled from 5% to 10%, enhancing production stability amid increasing climate variability.

Figure 2: Production and yield change (%), 2018-2023, Rwanda



Source: constructed with data from NISR, Seasonal Agriculture Survey, 2023

Post-harvest losses remain a key concern, especially for staple foods. A 2023 assessment revealed that post-harvest losses were 13.8% for maize, 12.4% for rice, and 11.3% for beans, underscoring the urgent need to strengthen storage, processing, and market infrastructure across the country.²⁷

¹⁹ NISR, Labour Force Survey

²⁰ PSTA 5

²¹ MINAGRI, National Agriculture Policy 2018

²² PSTA 5 Agri-food systems performance

²³ NISR, Seasonal Agriculture Survey (2018 and 2023)

²⁴ IFPRI source: <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/russia-ukraine-war-after-year-impacts-fertilizer-production-prices-and-trade-flows>

²⁵ IFPRI, 2022: "Expected impacts of increases in international prices of fertilizer in Rwanda" Source: <https://cgspace.cgiar.org/items/41c04b77-7b67-4e00-bd03-8781073688e1>

²⁶ NISR, Seasonal Agriculture Survey 2018-2023

²⁷ Martin Ntawubizi, Anselme Shyaka, Christine Mukantwali, Eugène Niyonzima, Jerome Ndahimana, and Jean Baptiste Ndahetuye, 2020, Situational analysis of the food safety control system in Rwanda: Animal-source foods, fruits, and vegetables, UR/RAB/RSB

The 5th Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation (PSTA 5): Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems

The Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture (PSTA 5) marks a pivotal shift toward a holistic food systems approach, positioning agriculture at the intersection of health, trade, environment, and infrastructure. Underpinned by a robust theory of change, PSTA 5 emphasizes linking farmers to high-value markets as the primary lever for unlocking the full potential of Rwanda's agri-food system. By strengthening value chain coordination, reducing post-harvest losses, and improving market access, the strategy aims to increase farmers' incomes and food security. This, in turn, is expected to catalyse further investments in improved inputs, technologies, and climate-resilient practices – enhancing productivity, reducing risk exposure, and creating employment opportunities across the Agri-food value chain.

Built around an estimated investment of RWF 6,406.5 billion, PSTA 5 anticipates that close to half – 44% of financing will come from the private sector, reflecting a strong emphasis on public-private partnerships. Budget allocations are structured across three strategic priority areas:



Importantly, PSTA 5 serves as a key implementation mechanism for the National Strategy for Transformation (NST 2), aligning seamlessly with the National Agriculture Policy and Vision 2050. The strategy reinforces national goals of sustainable food and nutrition security and enhanced system resilience. For example, while promoting agricultural intensification to increase productivity, PSTA 5 also prioritizes sustainability through practices such as conservation agriculture, balancing growth with environmental stewardship.²⁸

PSTA 5 includes a robust Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework designed to ensure effective implementation and adaptive management. The MEL plan involves systematic tracking of progress, assessment of outcomes, and the integration of lessons learned to inform evidence-based decision-making. It is aligned with the Government of Rwanda's planning and budgeting cycles and incorporates systems-based strategy considerations, ensuring coherence, responsiveness, and accountability throughout the implementation process.

²⁸ PSTA 5: Output 1.1.4: Climate-smart agriculture practices improved. Conservation agriculture involves several practices, including minimizing soil disturbance, preserving soil cover, diversifying crops, integrating nutrient management through customized application of organic and inorganic fertilizers, adopting agroforestry systems, integrating pest management strategies, implementing efficient irrigation methods, and integrating crop-livestock systems.

Conclusion

Rwanda's political support for and emphasis on agricultural development has delivered impressive poverty reduction and livelihood improvements. The country's notable efforts towards meeting the CAADP goals have positioned it as the continent's leader in this area. Nevertheless, much remains to be done to tackle persistent malnutrition challenges such as child stunting. In the latest survey, a third of children under five in Rwanda were stunted.

The country's development strategy recognizes that agriculture is pivotal, while the newest phase of the agricultural transformation strategy applies a food systems approach. This emphasizes the need for policy coherence and smart budgeting, and creates opportunities for government stakeholders and those in the ecosystem of support looking to accelerate the transformation of Rwanda's food system to deploy new tools and methods to help the process.

One example is the 3FS, or the Financial Flows to Food Systems tool²⁹, which provides decision-makers and stakeholders with evidence on the scale and scope of food system financing. This tool was recently implemented in Rwanda in July 2025, with results currently under review for validation by the government. The 3FS tool can help ascertain the food system areas receiving finances, to see if financial flows are aligned with national priorities, check for financing gaps, overlaps in spending, and improve targeting. It also aims to build strategic partnerships between the government and international players investing in the country, by aligning priorities and increasing impact within the sector.

28 See more about it here <https://www.ifad.org/documents/d/knowledge/3fs-factsheet>.



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