The Food Systems Countdown to 2030 Initiative

Africa regional focus

What is the tool and why is it needed?

There is wide agreement on the urgent need for food systems transformation to be more equitable, sustainable, and resilient for people and the planet. However, improving what is not measured is difficult. Food systems monitoring is essential to evaluate and improve performance, and can help align food systems decision-makers (e.g., governments, civil society, and international organizations) around key priorities, incentivize action, hold stakeholders accountable, sustain commitment by demonstrating progress, and enable course corrections. The **Food Systems Countdown to 2030 Initiative** aims to contribute rigorous, science-based monitoring to support food systems transformation.

The **Food Systems Countdown Initiative** emerged from the UN Food Systems Summit as a global interdisciplinary collaboration that now includes over 65 food systems experts from dozens of institutions worldwide. The Countdown published a monitoring framework (**Figure 1**) comprising five themes:

1	2	3	4	5
Diets, nutrition, and health	Environment, natural resources, and production	Livelihoods, poverty, and equity	Governance	Resilience

The Countdown then undertook a consultative process to select a set of 50 indicators across these themes, which constitutes the comprehensive indicator framework.

Figure 1. The Countdown monitoring framework

USER TIPS

The Countdown can provide policymakers and other food systems stakeholders with:

- A rigorous, science-based framework and indicators to monitor food systems transformation.
- An understanding of interactions and trade-offs between different areas and indicators across food systems.
- A look at which indicators are moving in the right direction and which ones are not, requiring more attention and resources.

Find the full set of briefs	The Food Systems Countdown to 2030 Initiative	The Food Systems Dashboard	Diet Quality Questionnaire	Diagnosing Food Systems Policy Coherence	Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN)	The Political Economy Decision Toolkit	Innovative Finance for Food Systems Transformation

Africa region food systems trends captured by the Countdown

The Countdown has published two global monitoring analyses to date. The first 2023 analysis provided a baseline assessment of the 50 indicators and emphasised food system opportunities and challenges in **every region and country**. The second 2024 analysis presented how these 50 indicators have changed over time globally, showing progress worth celebrating with 20 indicators moving in a desirable direction. However, the analysis also showed challenges with 7 indicators worsening and 15 remaining unchanged globally, highlighting the clear need for governments to more actively shepherd food systems in positive directions.

In 2024, the Countdown baseline report on Africa showed wide variations across the diverse countries in this large region. Highlighted findings are presented for **Africa overall** below. Figures 2 to 6 show five examples of the latest Countdown indicator data capturing Africa; the two African countries recording the highest and lowest levels; the other global regions; and the global average.

In the area of **diets**, **nutrition, and health**, the African continent is not on track to meet SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by 2030 or the Malabo targets for ending malnutrition by 2025. Africa's prevalence of undernourishment was declining but began to rise since 2017. It remains higher than the global average (20% vs 14% in 2021). Some 64% of African people experience moderate food insecurity – much higher than the global average (30%). This has been increasing since 2015. Fruit availability (193 g/day) and vegetable availability (177 g/day) are lower than the global means (268 and 300 g/day, respectively) across 2010-2022. The cost of a healthy diet has been increasing both globally and in Africa, which closely mirrors the global trend of 3.7 PPP per dollar per day. While globally, the proportion of people able to afford a healthy diet is growing, in Africa this figure shows no improvement over time.

Figure 2. Cannot Afford a Healthy Diet indicator – Africa vs other regions and globally

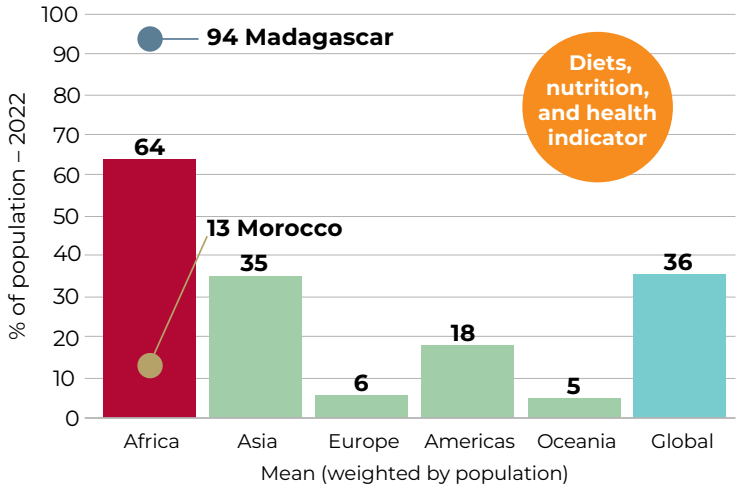
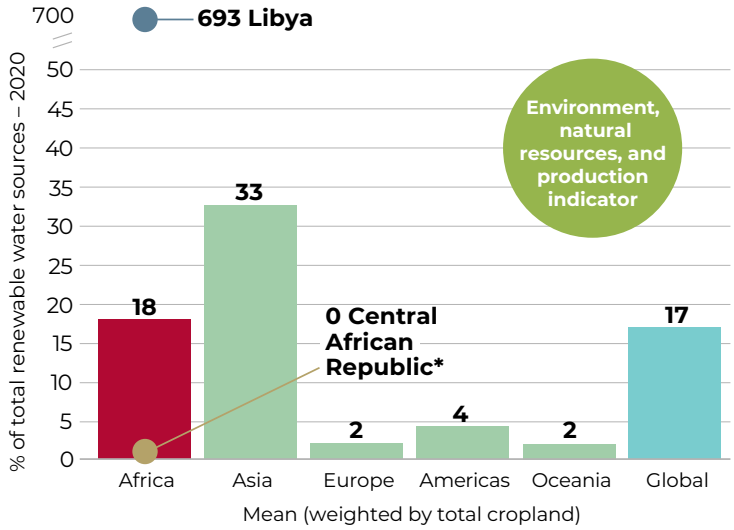


Figure 3. Agriculture Water Withdrawal indicator – Africa vs other regions and globally



Note: The two African countries shown in each figure exhibit the highest and lowest levels in the region

In the area of **environment**, **natural resources, and production**, Africa's food system greenhouse gas emissions remain low (52,756.8 kt CO2eq). Emissions intensities measure greenhouse gas emissions from the production of different crops and livestock within the farm gate. While cereal and rice emissions intensities in Africa are similar to global means, both beef and dairy emissions intensities are higher in Africa, owing to inefficiencies. Yields of rice, fruit, vegetables, milk, and beef, while all lower than global means, have trended upward in a significant way. Cropland area change is quite similar to the global mean and has remained steady at 1%. Agricultural water withdrawals have also remained steady, though Africa's rate (18%) surpasses the global mean (17%).

In the area of **livelihoods**, **poverty, and equity**, Africa's potential is substantial, boasting 64% of the world's uncultivated arable land and a youthful workforce. Africa has a much higher share of agriculture in GDP than the global average, though the figures have varied considerably over time. Africa's regional mean has been nonetheless consistently higher at around 16% versus the global mean of about 4%. Both rural underemployment (9%) and unemployment (6%) are high in Africa compared to global means (6% and 4%, respectively) and are the highest among all UN regions.

The area of **governance** shows that 70% of countries in Africa had a food system transformation pathway in 2024, compared to 60% of countries globally. The food safety capacity score looks at the mechanisms in place for detecting and responding to foodborne disease to determine if governments can effectively manage food safety challenges. African governments' food safety capacity has remained a steady 51.6, but is below the global mean of 69.5. Overall government effectiveness (which assesses the quality of the government based on several factors including public and civil service, quality of policy formulations and implementation, and commitments) and government accountability (the degrees of oversight of a government) are quite different in that effectiveness in Africa is much lower than the global mean, but accountability is similar. Civil society participation in Africa has seen a slight decline in the last several years.

Figure 4. Share of Agriculture in GDP indicator – Africa vs other regions and globally

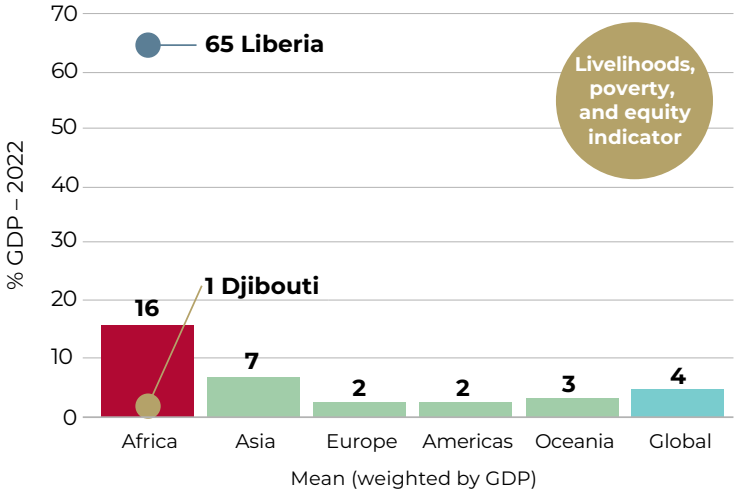
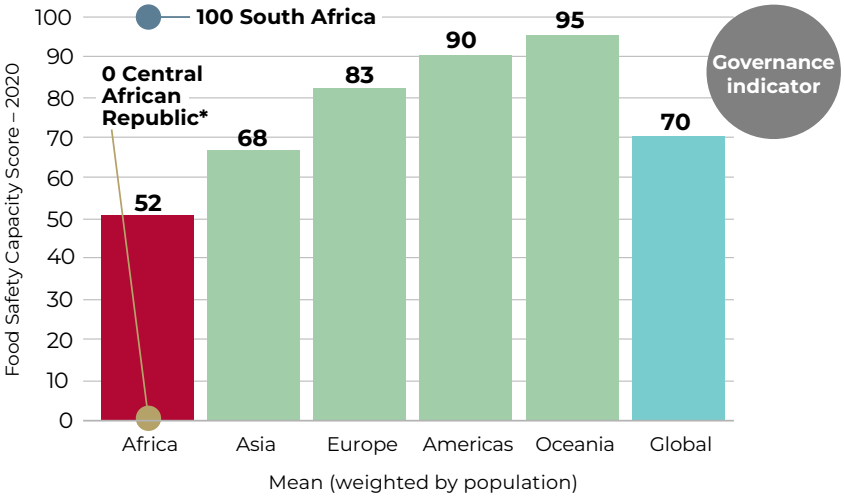


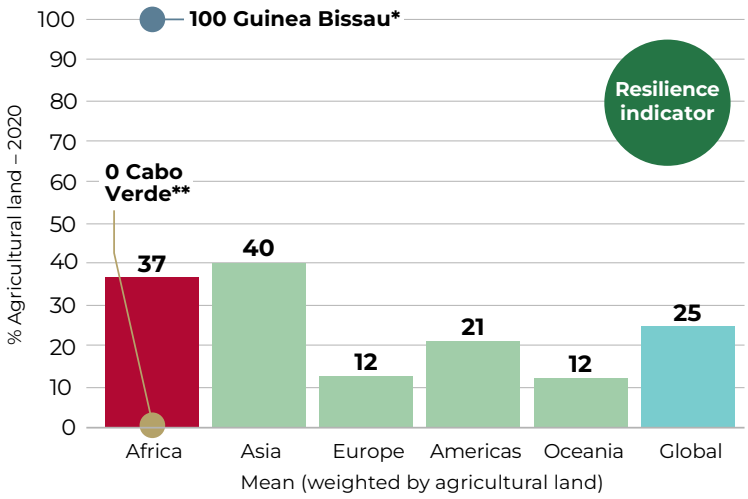
Figure 5. Food Safety Capacity Score indicator – Africa vs other regions and globally



Notes: The two African countries shown exhibit the highest and lowest levels in the region. *(Fig 5) Cote d'Ivoire also scores 0

In the area of **resilience**, conservation of plant (14,023.7) and animal genetic resources (0.8) is much lower in Africa than global means (166,534.7 and 5.1 respectively), though somewhat increasing since 2000. However, Africa maintains higher minimum species diversity as a percentage of agricultural land with 24 or more species (37% compared to global 25%). This diversification improves the ability to cope with both environmental and market changes. Food supply variability (28.7 kcal/day) and food price volatility (0.7 index) parallel the global means (29.3 kcal/day and 0.7 index, respectively).

Figure 6. Minimum Species Diversity indicator* – Africa vs other regions and globally



Notes: *Proportion of agricultural land with minimum level of species diversity (crop and pasture). *And 8 other African countries. ** Comoros also scores 0. The two African countries shown exhibit the highest and lowest levels in the region.

Summary

The Countdown data for Africa reveals a region with significant potential for food system innovation and development, but one facing critical and chronic challenges in food security, nutrition, and sustainable development. Urgent and comprehensive transformation of African food systems is needed – beyond production increases, this must improve market access, enhance food security, diversify nutrition, and boost climate resilience, and overall sustainability. Such a holistic approach is imperative to address the multifaceted challenges facing African agriculture and to harness the continent's immense potential for food system innovation and development.

Countdown data, which can be found on the Food Systems Dashboard www.foodsystemsdashboard.org can help African stakeholders target critical interventions – from improving the region's food security to optimizing its extensive arable land potential. By focusing on both challenges and strengths identified in this baseline, Africa can build more resilient and sustainable food systems that align with both regional needs and global sustainability goals.

References

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