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Youth, innovation and Africa's agrifood future


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From commitment to momentum: Africa's agrifood policy is finally delivering

One of the most promising shifts across the continent is the growing emphasis on whole-of-government coordination, given that agrifood systems do not sit within agriculture alone, but intersect with trade, finance, environment, infrastructure, health, and youth employment

SITHEMBILE MWAMAKAMBA, DR RACHEL MKANDAWIRE, AND STELLA MASSAWE,

Across Africa, a quiet but important shift is underway. For years, the dominant narrative around agrifood policy has focused on the gap between ambition and implementation. While that gap remains real, it no longer tells the full story. Regional Economic Communities (RECs), such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), among others, are demonstrating something equally important: A growing capacity to learn, adapt, and deliver.

Africa's policy architecture is not lacking. Frameworks such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Strategy and Action Plan 2026-2035, the African Agribusiness Youth Strategy (AAYS), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), provide comprehensive roadmaps anchored in resilience, trade integration, and inclusive growth. What is changing is how seriously institutions are taking the work of turning those roadmaps into action.

From paper to practice

In April 2026, the EAC's Regional Validation Meeting of the Draft Agri-Food Systems Investment Plan (RASIP) in Dar es Salaam marked a critical step in this transition. Built on the previous Regional Agriculture Investment

Plan, the RASIP prioritises shared challenges, trade facilitation, climate resilience, and transboundary risks, while complementing national investment plans. In Southern Africa, the validation of the SADC Regional Agricultural Investment Plan 2023-2030 reflects a similarly maturing approach, positioning agriculture as a driver of economic growth rather than a production sector alone.

These are not small achievements. They signal a policy ecosystem increasingly focused on delivery over declaration.

Yes, implementation challenges persist. Progress remains uneven across member states, and financing, coordination, and capacity constraints continue to shape outcomes. But what is shifting is how these challenges are being approached. Rather than viewing gaps as failures, institutions are increasingly treating them as learning opportunities, signals that help refine strategies and improve delivery. The Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), with support from the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), has been working with both the EAC and SADC to strengthen evidence and knowledge systems, making data more accessible so that it can genuinely inform decision-making.

Coherence over silos

One of the most promising shifts across the continent is the growing emphasis on whole-of-government coordination. Agrifood systems do

not sit within agriculture alone. They intersect with trade, finance, environment, infrastructure, health, and youth employment. Historically, policies developed and implemented within sectoral silos produced fragmented interventions and missed opportunities. Today, RECs are actively promoting integrated approaches that recognise this reality.

What is emerging are three inter-linked priorities: Stronger inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms; alignment with national planning and budgeting systems; and clearer institutional accountability for implementation. Effective policy no longer stops at the regional level. It must cascade down to national and sub-national levels where delivery actually happens.

'The future of Africa's agrifood systems will be determined not by the strength of its policies alone, but by the ability of its institutions to evolve, adapt, and deliver results at scale.'



Youth as drivers, not afterthoughts

Youth inclusion in Africa's agrifood systems is moving beyond rhetoric toward meaningful participation. Earlier policy frameworks often positioned young people as passive beneficiaries. There is now a deliberate shift to recognise and support them as innovators, entrepreneurs, and policy actors shaping the future of food systems.

The AAYS reinforces this transition. It calls for deliberate investments in youth entrepreneurship, stronger integration of youth priorities into



Potato farmer in DRC. Picture: Daniel Buuma

national and regional investment plans, and meaningful participation of young people in policy dialogue. Unlocking Africa's demographic dividend, the strategy makes clear, requires moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward practical support systems that connect youth to finance, markets, technology, and policy influence.

FANRPAN and AGRA have been operationalising this through the FANRPAN Youth Policy Fellowship supported by AGRA under the Youth Entrepreneurship for the Future of Food and Agriculture (YEFFA) initiative, equipping young professionals across the region with the skills to engage in policy processes, translate evidence into advocacy, and contribute to the domestication of regional frameworks. Monthly knowledge-sharing webinars further amplify youth-led success stories and create linkages between entrepreneurs, policymakers, and investors.

Finance as the missing link

Perhaps the most consequential shift is the growing recognition that implementation hinges on financing. Robust policies are necessary, but without credible, sustained investment, they remain aspirational. Across both regions, momentum is building toward embedding investment thinking directly into policy processes, aligning regional commitments with national budgets, strengthening domestic resource mobilisation, and developing bankable project pipe-

lines that can attract both public and private financing.

This evolution is closely aligned with the CAADP Kampala Declaration, which places strong emphasis on investment readiness and results. What is emerging is a reframing of policy frameworks, not just as guiding documents, but as investment platforms designed to connect priorities to resources.

The direction of travel is clear

Africa's agrifood policy landscape is entering a decisive and more mature phase. The foundational work has been done. Political commitment is not in question. What is shifting now is the centre of gravity; from designing frameworks to ensuring they deliver tangible, measurable outcomes on the ground.

The narrative is beginning to change, not from ambition to failure as has so often been the case, but from commitment to delivery. If this trajectory is sustained, Africa is well-positioned to unlock the full potential of its agrifood systems, driving resilience, economic growth, and inclusive development for the millions who depend on them.

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PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Turning evidence into action: Africa youth engagement

Africa's agricultural transformation cannot be driven by policy alone. It requires systems, robust evidence systems, coordinated institutions, and empowered people to translate regional commitments into real change at the farm level.

That is the work at the heart of FANRPAN's 18-month initiative, implemented with support from AGRA: Leveraging Knowledge Management to Enhance Policy Harmonisation

and Domestication for Agricultural Transformation in East and Southern Africa.

The project targets a persistent and consequential gap, the uneven implementation of continental frameworks such as CAADP, the AAYS, and regional seed and fertiliser policies within the East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The challenges are well-documented:

Limited access to reliable, context-specific data; weak institutional capacity for policy analysis; insufficient coordination among member states; and technological constraints that hinder effective knowledge exchange. The 4th Biennial Review of CAADP reinforces the urgency, highlighting persistent weaknesses in national agricultural data systems and a limited capacity for evidence-based policymaking.

FANRPAN's response is practical. By strengthening knowledge management systems, improving the availability, accessibility, and use of timely evidence, the initiative is helping to make regional policy frameworks not just better designed, but more effectively implemented.

Central to this is the FANRPAN Youth Policy Fellowship supported by AGRA under the Youth Entrepreneurship for the Future of Food and

Agriculture (YEFFA) initiative – a structured programme that equips young professionals from across Eastern and Southern Africa with the skills to engage in policy dialogue, develop policy briefs, and present them from ward level all the way to national platforms. Fellows benefit from mentorship, peer learning, and direct exposure to high-level policy processes.

The stories that follow are a window into that fellowship in action. They are stories of young Africans who are not waiting to be included. They are already leading.

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INNOVATION STORY | KENYA

The App that knows what's wrong with your cow

BY JULIUS ONGWAE

For years, livestock farmers in Kisii County, Kenya, have relied on traditional knowledge, guesswork, and delayed veterinary interventions. Access to extension services remains limited, while the cost and distance to veterinary officers continue to hinder timely response. The result is a cycle of preventable losses, reduced productivity, and economic strain.

It is within this gap that a new wave of youth-led innovation is emerging. At the centre of this transformation is Aniwise, an AI-powered livestock management application designed to bring real-time diagnosis and farm intelligence directly to farmers' phones.

Its founder is Polycarp Orenda, 21, a student of Animal Science and Technology at Kisii University. The concept is simple in practice: "A farmer simply takes a photo, uploads it, and the system analyses and gives the problem and solution in seconds." The diagnosis carries up to 90 percent accuracy, based on internal validation using labelled datasets and continuous feedback from real-world usage – model predictions tested against known animal health conditions and refined iteratively.

But Orenda built Aniwise to be far more than a diagnostic tool. "We want farmers to move from reactive farming to informed decision-making," he says. "The app builds a digital history for each animal, helping farmers detect patterns and prevent recurring diseases." Everything a farmer needs is in one place: Re-



cord keeping, financial tracking, disease management, feeding guidelines by animal age and stage, and access to professionals through livestream support.

The app is drawing around 500 new users daily, a figure Orenda tracks through in-app analytics, including daily active users, session frequency, and overall engagement, ensuring the numbers reflect real usage rather than downloads alone. Officials at Kisii's State Department of Agriculture have described the app as highly effective and well-suited for enhancing extension services.

For farmer Alex Botangi, an early adopter, the difference is tangible. "I used to rely on traditional methods, which sometimes made me administer the wrong treatment or vaccine," he recalls. "Now, I just scan the animal using the app, and it gives me information about the disease and what action to take." Milk production has improved, he says, because the app guides him on the right feeding ratios at each stage of an animal's development. "It is also interac-

tive," Botangi adds. "You learn new things about livestock even when you are just going through it."

For developer Davis Ogega, the ambition extends well beyond individual farms. "Right now, Aniwise helps individual farmers make faster and more accurate decisions," he says, "but the bigger vision is scaling it into a system that connects the entire livestock sector." Veterinary officers could review cases remotely instead of travelling long distances. "It stops being just a tool and becomes a support system that learns continuously from thousands of farms."

Chairperson of the Agricultural Sciences Department at Kisii University Dr Lydia Kitonga, sees it as a signal of something continental. "Aniwise is on time for the season we are in," she says. "It signals the rise of digital smart agriculture where technology, especially AI, is becoming a core farming tool rather than an option." She adds, "This is a clear example of youth-led transformation. It also pushes institutions to adopt more prac-

tice-oriented education that integrates technology and entrepreneurship."

The Director of Kisii County's Veterinary Services Department Dr Gerald Manyeki, welcomes the technology while urging perspective. "With better data collection and tools like digital animal identification, we can strengthen traceability and improve overall livestock management," he says, adding that technology must complement, not replace, field inspections, vaccination programmes, and professional expertise.

Aniwise has already earned recognition on competitive innovation platforms. At the Western Region Research and Innovation Consortium (WRIC), it emerged first in the Agri-tech and Climate-Resilient Food Systems sub-theme. At the Kisii University Career Exposure and Innovations Competition 2025, it was named overall best innovation. "Praised," Orenda notes, "for its strong focus on addressing youth unemployment, promoting green career opportunities, and supporting climate-smart livestock production through technology-driven solutions."

Kenya's Draft Agricultural Data, Information and Digital Policy (2026) – with plans for a centralised Agricultural Digital Information Centre and expanded e-extension services – creates fertile ground for the app to grow. Orenda is confident about what comes next: "If county extension officers and the Ministry of Agriculture support awareness, adoption will grow rapidly."

FELLOW SPOTLIGHT, TANZANIA



Innocent Cosmas Msoka

Cracking the soil crisis in Tanzania, one eggshell at a time

ALIS OKONJI-BOWNDS

Sub-Saharan Africa has lost an estimated 40 percent of its topsoil productivity over the past century, driven largely by the overuse of synthetic fertilisers that strip soils of microbial life and acidify the earth over time. In Tanzania, smallholder farmers spend a disproportionate share of their income on those same chemical inputs, often without the yields to show for it. Meanwhile, about 70 percent of organic waste in Arusha's markets ends up in dumpsites.

Innocent Cosmas Msoka, 24, has found a connection between these two problems. His company, ShellGro Solutions Tanzania, produces two organic fertilisers in liquid and powder form, both made entirely from discarded eggshells. The science is sound. Eggshells are primarily calcium carbonate, a natural soil amendment that raises pH in acidic soils and improves nutrient uptake. When the formulation called for citric acid, Innocent reached for a lemon. "We are totally advocating for organic agroecology," he says.

ShellGro already reaches between 1,000 and 3,500 smallholder farmers across Arusha, Manyara, and Babati through partnerships with local agroecology networks. Farmers receive education on proper organic use before the product is even in their hands. Innocent's team first interviews each farmer about their soil history, what they've grown before, and what inputs they've used, ensuring the fertiliser is matched to real need.

But for Innocent, the work has never been only about soil. Following the FANRPAN YEFFA Fellowship, he co-founded the Arusha Food System Policy Advisory Council, a youth-led body that trains young leaders to develop policy briefs and present them from ward level all the way to the national level.

That policy confidence is exactly what the FANRPAN YEFFA Fellowship is designed to build. Innocent is one of the programme's fellows, selected to lead food systems transformation and engage directly with policymakers across the continent. For Innocent, turning waste into wealth is only part of the mission. Turning young people into policy actors is the other.



Egg shells used to make fertiliser.

FELLOW SPOTLIGHT | KENYA

The 23-year-old Kenyan transforming carbon credits markets

ALIS OKONJI-BOWNDS

Africa holds an estimated 15 percent of the world's carbon sequestration potential, forests, mangroves, rangelands, and soils that breathe in what the rest of the world breathes out. It is one of the planet's most valuable climate assets. And yet foreign buyers are purchasing African carbon credits for as little as \$3 per tonne, while equivalent credits trade in EU-regulated markets for multiples of that. The continent currently captures just two percent of its theoretical annual potential. It is being massively undersold.

Martha Mukai, 23, from the Kenyan coast, is working to change that. She is the co-founder of Mukaia Carbon Hub, a cli-



Martha Mukai

mate company operating across Kenya, Zambia, Brazil, and Nigeria, with a mission to support farmers and landowners to access global climate finance markets through carbon credits and maintain the sovereignty

of their land while doing it. The company has already supported around 10,000 farmers and facilitated hundreds of thousands of dollars in climate finance.

The problem is not abstract. Carbon credit companies have long descended on African farmlands with complicated contracts and token payments, while the real money flows elsewhere. Martha knows this not just from research but from her own family's land.

Her team's response was to build a device. The VIC Sensor, assembled in Kenya, is a solar-powered, satellite-connected monitor that tracks carbon levels, land degradation, and deforestation in real time, sending live data to a 3D dashboard

platform. Collecting carbon data for market certification traditionally takes two to three years. The VIC Sensor does it daily. The data is used to certify land through Verra, the global carbon standard body.

At Chalongo Conservancy in the Tsavo area, a 100-hectare coastal conservancy that had been approached by predatory carbon credit firms, Martha's team stepped in. The conservancy is now earning regular income from its credits, enough to manage the farm and pay staff. Martha is also a FANRPAN YEFFA Fellow, a fitting designation for someone whose work is as much about changing the rules of the game as it is about building technology.