

Honorable guests,

It is a privilege to address you today on a subject of “Boosting agrifood research and innovation cooperation for sustainable impact at scale”. I was impressed by the title, so I wanted to mention it. We stand at the crossroads of unprecedented global challenges. As we look to the future, Europe and Africa are both in the midst of transformative shifts — like the much needed transformations of our food systems—shifts that can only succeed if we learn from each other and work together.

Recently, both Africa and Europe have come up with a new commission, EU launched their new team in December 2024 and the African Union commission was elected last February. Both teams are now looking for beacons or holds in the turbulent geopolitical times.

And amidst the turmoil there are two important statements when it comes to the future of their agro-food systems— the Strategic Dialogue (SD) in the EU, recently followed by the new 100 day vision of the Commissioner, and the recent Kampala Declaration (KD).

Both have outlined ambitious plans for food systems transformation. Both aim at the same goal: vitalizing and strengthening their agricultural sectors and achieving the SDGs through better, more sustainable food systems. And while they emerge from different contexts, they offer us a valuable opportunity to take stock and consider how we can act — not just within our borders, but as part of a global, interconnected food system.

Take the Kampala Declaration; the roadmap for Africa’s agricultural transformation for 2026-2035. The declaration comes out of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), with a focus on making agriculture more resilient and sustainable. For Africa, the challenges are clear: boosting agricultural production to meet the demands of a growing population, increasing intra-African trade, empowering smallholder farmers, and tackling malnutrition in all its forms.

Now, at first glance, Europe and Africa may seem like they’re on two very different paths. But I would argue that the reality is more nuanced. Both of us are grappling with the same overarching challenges: the effects of climate change, biodiversity loss and increasing scarcity of some resources. And both of us are trying to create food systems that are resilient and sustainable, with agriculture that contributes to a healthier population and a greener economy.

So Let’s look at the similarities and let’s look on where we can strengthen each other:

First, both the strategic dialogue and the Kampala declaration emphasize the need for sustainable, resilient agri-food systems. Whether it's Europe's push for climate-smart agriculture, or Africa's focus on empowering smallholder farmers, there's an undeniable urgency in both regions to rethink how we produce food. Simply continuing on the same path is not an option. We're no longer talking about just increasing yields — it's about producing food more efficiently while taking into account the threats of climate change, it's about rethinking the use of scarce land and water resources. It's about rethinking geopolitical dependencies.

Second, both recognize the importance of empowering farmers. In Africa, this means improving access to markets, finance, and technology for smallholder farmers. In Europe, we're dealing with the redistribution of finance in the common agricultural policies. In Europe there is a need to make agriculture attractive to younger generations, who are increasingly disconnected from rural areas.

And thirdly, for these necessary transitions a key point is the building and sharing of knowledge and innovation. Both Africa and Europe understand that research and innovation are critical to transforming food systems. In Europe, we've been investing in agricultural innovation for decades, notably through programs like Horizon Europe. And in the new 10-year plan of the African Agenda 2063, there is a serious ambition for research & innovation, for instance, there is the ambition to train 100,000 PhD graduates in the next 10 years.

It is here that collaboration has been happening. For example, through the EU-Africa High-Level Policy Dialogue on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA). It is planned that there will be another EU-AU summit at the end of this year to elaborate/adapt things to the new political context.

The challenge is how we make sure that knowledge and innovations are shared effectively — between universities, between scientists, and importantly, from science to farmers.

Now, while the similarities between the EU and the African policies are important, the differences cannot be ignored. Africa is still largely focused on increasing production, while Europe even has to consider reducing animal production in certain regions to restore ecological balance.

In Africa, there's a strong focus on value addition of the whole agricultural chain. How can Africa process more of its agricultural output locally, rather than exporting raw materials, leaving much of the economic benefits to others?

In Europe, we've built sophisticated value chains, but we face the challenge of making sure the benefits are shared equally within the chain, and on how to make

them more sustainable and circular.

And here is where we have an opportunity: Africa and Europe are both rich in potential for trade, innovation, and sustainability. Europe has a long-standing commitment to research and development in agriculture. Africa has an immense potential to leapfrog older technologies, innovate and close yield gaps. And both regions are looking for ways to boost trade — Africa through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and Europe through the Global Gateway.

I think with the current outlooks on policies, the EU's new approach to food systems, reflected in the 100-day vision of the European Commission, misses the opportunity for an integrated approach and risks being too fragmented. If we're truly going to meet the challenges, we need to look at the entire system — from production to consumption — .

The Kampala Declaration offers a roadmap for this kind of holistic approach, aligning agriculture, nutrition, economic development, and health.

Moreover, we cannot see the food systems of Europe and Afrika as separated systems, they are part of the closely interconnected global food systems, and we should think about the vulnerabilities and of the opportunities that this brings.

At the same time, Europe's focus on competitiveness is not misplaced. By producing food more efficiently and more sustainably, we can ensure our farmers remain competitive — not just within Europe, but globally. Neither Europe, nor Afrika can afford to forget that regions like Asia are investing heavily in sustainable agriculture, and we must stay ahead of the curve.

One area where Europe can really help is in capacity building. Europe has invested heavily in knowledge-sharing platforms, like the DeSIRA and LEAP-AGRI programs, which are designed to facilitate research collaborations between European and African institutions. But we need to evaluate how can we ensure that innovations coming out of these partnerships are scalable, practical, and accessible to farmers in both regions.

And let's not forget the financing challenge. Whether it's reducing post-harvest losses in Africa, or cutting greenhouse gas emissions in Europe, large-scale change will require significant investment. Europe's Global Gateway can help, but we need to focus those investments on sustainable agriculture and food systems to meet both our domestic and global challenges.

Having said this, I'm happy to see that The Working Group on Food & Nutrition

Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA) is shaping a shared research roadmap, that aligns research in this domain for the coming years. To support that, the International Research Consortium (IRC), is set up, that includes not only policy but also science, industry and civil society. Christophe, you ask to give concrete recommendations. My recommendation is short: let's make sure that everything is done to make sure this roadmap can be executed.

In closing, I want to emphasize that Europe and Africa both have a responsibility for the future — a responsibility to build food systems that are sustainable, resilient, fair, and healthy for all. And like Marjeta Jager said at the start, we should at least double our efforts. We must act now, not just within our own borders, but as part of a broader, interconnected world. We all share the same planet.

Let's seize this moment, learn from one another, and build the food systems of the future — for Europe, for Africa, and for the world.