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Proposed Roadmap for Integrating Opportunity Crops into Africa's Agrifood Systems 2026-2035

From shared vision to coordinated action

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Proposed Roadmap for Integrating Opportunity Crops into Africa's Agrifood Systems

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Editorial note

This proposed roadmap was prepared as an output of the FAO and FARA led Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa (Accra, 9–11 June 2026). It draws on the consultation's working-group outputs and on the FAO–FARA stakeholder mapping survey of 84 institutions. It is offered as a framework to guide coordinated action and creates no obligations for any government, institution or partner. Its milestones, targets and indicators are indicative. Countries are expected to adapt them to their national roadmaps and crop portfolios as desired. The proposed roadmap should be read alongside the Kampala CAADP Declaration and Strategy and Action Plan 2026–2035.

Proposed Roadmap for Integrating Opportunity Crops into Africa's Agrifood Systems

2026–2035

From shared vision to coordinated action

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Proposed Roadmap for Integrating Opportunity Crops into Africa's Agrifood Systems

2026–2035 | From shared vision to coordinated action

1. Purpose

This proposed roadmap provides a practical continental framework for integrating Africa's opportunity crops into mainstream agrifood systems. It aligns policies, research and innovation, conservation, seed systems, production, enterprise development, markets and consumer demand around a coherent set of priorities and actions. It also clarifies the roles of key stakeholders, promotes coordination across national, regional and continental levels, and establishes implementation phases, financing pathways and measurable results. Ultimately, the proposed roadmap seeks to translate existing commitments and knowledge into coordinated action that strengthens food and nutrition security, climate resilience, biodiversity, livelihoods and inclusive economic growth across Africa.

2. Background

Africa's agrifood systems depend heavily on a narrow range of staples, although the continent possesses indigenous cultivated species with nutritional, climatic, cultural and economic attributes (Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa [FARA], 2022; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2024). Integrating these "opportunity crops" into production, seed systems, processing, markets and diets can diversify food supplies, strengthen resilience, conserve biodiversity and create enterprises (FAO, 2024, 2025).

Over two decades, Africa has strengthened its policy foundation through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program, beginning with the 2003 Maputo commitments, followed by the 2014 Malabo Declaration and the Kampala CAADP Declaration and Strategy and Action Plan 2026–2035 (African Union, 2014, 2025). Within this agenda, the 2013 Accra Statement for a Food-Secure Africa called for coordinated research, value-chain development and enabling policies to expand the contribution of neglected and underutilized species (Bioversity International, 2013). The Africa Manifesto and Plan of Action on Forgotten Foods subsequently provided a continental framework for conservation, production, utilization, research, markets and policy action, while the FAO–FARA Compendium documented 100 promising African foods requiring greater investment and use (FARA, 2022; FAO, 2024).

These frameworks established vision and political legitimacy, but their benefits depend on implementation across connected food-system functions. A renewed action plan is therefore required to assess progress, identify unfinished commitments and delivery bottlenecks, clarify responsibilities, mobilize financing and establish measurable targets. The proposed roadmap should convert advocacy and knowledge into coordinated action that delivers better nutrition, resilient livelihoods, competitive enterprises and sustainable African agrifood systems. Africa already has much of the knowledge and institutional capacity required. The challenge is to connect fragmented efforts, invest across the whole food system and measure delivery.

This proposed roadmap was developed following the FAO/FARA consultation in Accra, which brought together a broad stakeholder group to jointly identify key actions for the future. The proposed roadmap also draws on empirical evidence from the stakeholder mapping and the status of integration efforts.

3. The Vision

By 2035, the identified opportunity crops are routinely conserved, improved, produced, traded, processed, and consumed as competitive components of diverse, healthy, and resilient African agrifood systems.

4. Guiding Principles for Implementation

Implementation of the proposed roadmap will be country-led and adapted to national and local contexts, while maintaining alignment with continental priorities and promoting regional cooperation. Actions will be informed by farmers' experience, consumer preferences and market demand, with science and innovation strengthening, rather than displacing, local knowledge, cultural practices and crop diversity. Inclusion will be embedded throughout implementation to ensure that women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, smallholder farmers and small and medium-sized enterprises have meaningful participation and equitably share the opportunities, value and benefits generated.

Implementation will also adopt a portfolio-based, results-focused approach, combining achievable short-term actions with sustained investments in institutional capacity, research, seed systems, value-chain development, and markets. Together, these principles will promote coordinated, inclusive and accountable action while allowing countries and communities flexibility to respond to their particular needs, priorities and agrifood-system conditions.

5. Strategic Framework

Seven mutually reinforcing priorities

The priorities should be implemented as interconnected components of a single food-system transformation agenda, rather than as separate interventions. Conservation without sustainable use will not improve livelihoods; breeding without functional seed delivery systems will not place improved and diverse planting materials in farmers' hands; and increased production without processing capacity, market access and consumer demand may create surpluses without viable economic returns. Likewise, market promotion without reliable supply, quality standards and supportive policies cannot sustain commercial growth.

Effective integration of opportunity crops therefore requires coordinated investment across conservation, research, breeding, seed systems, production, processing, enterprise development, finance, markets and consumer awareness. Progress in each area should reinforce the others through shared planning, clearly defined responsibilities and measurable results. This integrated approach will connect genetic diversity and scientific innovation with farmers, enterprises and consumers, enabling opportunity crops to contribute sustainably to nutrition, climate resilience, livelihoods, biodiversity conservation and inclusive economic growth.

Table 1. Priority actions and descriptors of actions

Priority Action	Descriptors
1. Conserve & mobilize	Fill collection gaps; characterize and document diversity; strengthen in situ/on-farm and ex situ conservation, safety duplication, digital catalogs and equitable access and benefit-sharing.
2. Research & improve	Fund multidisciplinary research, participatory breeding, genomics, phenotyping, agronomy and mechanization for productive, nutritious, climate-resilient and market-responsive crops.
3. Deliver Quality Seed	Connect formal, community and farmer-managed systems; support seed multiplication, quality assurance, variety registration and locally appropriate regulatory pathways.
4. Build Value Chains	Invest in aggregation, processing, storage, food safety, standards, certification, logistics, market intelligence, branding, consumer awareness and institutional procurement.
5. Mainstream Policy & Finance	Embed opportunity crops in agriculture, nutrition, biodiversity, climate, education, public procurement and trade instruments; establish sustained public, development and private finance.
6. Strengthen Capacity	Modernize university and technical curricula; strengthen breeders, genebanks, extension, seed specialists, food technologists, entrepreneurs and policy capability, especially among women and youth.
7. Coordinate Delivery	Use existing continental, regional and national institutions; establish a community of practice, shared evidence platform, joint programming and periodic performance review to reduce duplication.

6. Outcome statement (2035)

System Result

Greater crop and dietary diversity; more resilient farming systems; reliable quality seed; stronger rural enterprises and regional trade; improved nutrition; and equitable value capture by producers and communities.

Crop and country portfolio approach

Each country should select a manageable portfolio using transparent criteria: nutritional and climate value; cultural relevance; genetic-resource status; farmer and consumer demand; market potential; readiness of research, seed and processing systems; and the additionality of public action. Portfolios should be reviewed every three years.

Implementations Phases

Table 2. Milestones and Priority Actions

Phase	Core Actions	Delivery Milestones
2026–27 Organize & prepare	Publish national baselines and crop portfolios; designate focal institutions; agree safeguards, targets and indicators; establish the community of practice and open evidence platform.	At least 20 country roadmaps; baseline for every participating country; five regional investment portfolios.

Phase	Core Actions	Delivery Milestones
	Launch gap-focused germplasm collection and characterization; breeder–farmer–consumer product profiles; seed-system diagnostics; processing and market feasibility studies.	Priority accessions secured and searchable; crop product profiles and seed plans approved; bankable enterprise cases prepared.
2028–30 Scale & connect	Run coordinated multi-location breeding and agronomy; multiply seed through plural systems; validate quality assurance and registration pathways; strengthen extension and digital advisory services.	Farmer-preferred varieties/materials advanced; quality seed availability expands in target zones; extension packages operational.
	Develop processing clusters, standards, food-safety systems, branding, consumer campaigns and procurement pilots in schools, hospitals and safety-net programs.	Reduced post-harvest loss; new products and SMEs; rising institutional and retail demand; improved farmer margins.
2031–35 Institutionalize & sustain	Embed successful models in national budgets, NAIPs/NASIPs, nutrition and climate plans, seed rules, curricula and regional trade instruments; expand blended and commercial finance.	Recurring public finance; harmonized regional pathways; durable enterprises and services beyond projects.
	Commission independent impact review and refresh portfolios based on nutrition, resilience, biodiversity, income, gender and youth outcomes.	Verified contribution to agrifood-system outcomes and an agreed post-2035 investment agenda.

7. Delivery Architecture and Financing

Successful implementation of the proposed roadmap requires a delivery architecture that converts continental commitments into coordinated measurable action at regional, national and local levels. Because opportunity crops cut across agriculture, environment, nutrition, health, education, trade, research and enterprise development, implementation cannot be assigned to a single institution or sector. A clearly defined, country-led architecture is therefore needed to connect continental policy guidance and regional cooperation with national planning, investment and delivery. It should clarify institutional responsibilities, establish coordination and accountability mechanisms, engage farmers and the private sector, and enable regular monitoring, learning and adaptation.

Financing must similarly move beyond fragmented, short-term projects towards coordinated investment portfolios that support the entire opportunity-crop system. Public finance will remain essential for conservation, research, infrastructure, policy development and institutional capacity. However, sustained transformation will also require development-partner funding, private investment, concessional finance, blended-finance instruments and producer or community-based mechanisms. Resources should connect crop improvement and seed delivery with production, processing, enterprise development, market access and consumer demand.

The delivery architecture and financing framework should therefore operate together. Institutional arrangements must translate priorities into investable programs, while financing decisions should be guided by clearly defined outcomes, responsibilities and performance indicators. Transparent resource tracking, joint reviews and results-based allocation will strengthen accountability and enable successful interventions to be scaled. This integrated approach will help countries convert existing commitments into durable food-system, livelihood, nutrition and resilience outcomes.

8. Coordination model built on existing mandates

Continental

The AUC/AUDA-NEPAD provide policy alignment with CAADP; FAO and FARA convene technical cooperation, knowledge exchange, resource mobilization and performance synthesis with relevant continental partners.

Regional

The RECs and subregional research organizations translate the proposed roadmap into regional programs, align seed and trade approaches, support cross-border learning and aggregate results.

National

The Governments will lead country roadmaps through a multi-stakeholder platform linked to existing CAADP/food-system coordination; NARES, universities, farmers, gene banks, CSOs, private firms and finance institutions co-deliver.

Table 3. Accountability by Actor

Actor	Primary Accountability
Governments	Policy coherence, public budgets, procurement, enabling regulation, infrastructure and reporting.
Research & gene banks	Conservation, characterization, breeding, agronomy, food science, open data and evidence.
Farmers & communities	Priority-setting, on-farm conservation, participatory evaluation, seed delivery and local knowledge.
Private sector & finance	Seed, mechanization, processing, logistics, products, markets, investment and responsible contracts.
Universities & extension	Curricula, professional skills, advisory packages, incubation and workforce development.
Partners & civil society	Catalytic finance, technical cooperation, safeguards, inclusion, learning and public awareness.

9. Financing model: fund the portfolio, not isolated activities

A financing compact should combine four complementary windows:

- Public core finance—genebanks, long-horizon research, extension, standards, data, coordination and public procurement.
- Catalytic grants and challenge funds—early breeding, seed multiplication, product innovation, evidence and inclusion.
- Blended and development finance—shared infrastructure, processing clusters, working capital and risk-sharing facilities.
- Responsible private capital—commercial seed, processing, logistics, retail and export, with fair contracting and farmer value capture.

Investment gate:

Every major proposal should show the full pathway from genetic resources and production to seed, processing, demand and measurable benefits—and identify who sustains recurrent costs after project finance ends.

10. Results, Learning and Decisions

Core Results Framework

The Core Results Framework provides a common basis for planning, monitoring, learning and accountability while preserving sufficient flexibility for countries to respond to their particular agrifood-system conditions. Each participating country will establish a credible baseline in 2026/27 and set context-specific targets aligned with its national priorities, institutional capacity, selected opportunity crops and level of value-chain development. Targets should cover the interconnected areas of conservation, research and crop improvement, seed access, production, processing, market development, consumption, policy support and investment.

Continental reporting will aggregate a limited set of clearly defined common indicators to assess collective progress, enable comparison and identify implementation gaps across countries and regions. These indicators should measure not only activities and outputs such as accessions conserved, varieties developed, producers reached and enterprises supported, but also outcomes, including adoption, productivity, dietary diversity, market growth, income generation, resilience and sustainable use of crop diversity. Common definitions, reporting protocols and data-quality standards will be established to improve the consistency and credibility of reported results.

The framework will explicitly assess how benefits, opportunities and risks are distributed. Wherever relevant, data will be disaggregated by sex, age, location and actor group, including smallholder farmers, Indigenous Peoples, producer organizations and small and medium-sized enterprises. This will help determine who participates, who benefits and who may be excluded from program interventions.

National monitoring systems should serve as the primary source of evidence, complemented by surveys, market data, research findings and community-based monitoring. Periodic national and continental reviews will use the evidence to assess performance, support peer learning, adapt implementation strategies and guide resource allocation. The framework should therefore function not merely as a reporting mechanism, but as a practical management tool for improving delivery and demonstrating the contribution of opportunity crops to resilient, nutritious, inclusive and sustainable African agrifood systems.

Table 4. Result area and indicators

Result Area	Illustrative Common Indicators	Frequency
Diversity secured & used	Priority accessions/landraces newly collected, characterized, safely duplicated and accessible; community/on-farm conservation sites supported.	Annual
Science converted to options	Farmer- and consumer-defined product profiles; varieties/materials released or advanced; validated agronomy, nutrition and processing protocols.	Annual
Quality seed reaches farmers	Volume and geographic reach of quality seed/planting material by formal, community and farmer-managed channels; share reaching women/youth producers.	Seasonal
Markets become viable	Enterprises/products launched; procurement contracts; sales volumes and value; post-harvest loss; farmer price/margin and jobs created.	Annual
Policy & finance institutionalized	Countries with budgeted proposed roadmap actions and explicit i in agriculture, nutrition, climate, biodiversity, seed or procurement instruments; finance mobilized by source.	Annual
Capacity & coordination improve	People/institutions trained and applying skills; joint programs; shared datasets; duplication resolved; delivery reviews completed and acted upon.	Annual
Food-system outcomes	Change in production and dietary diversity, household availability/consumption, resilience, income and biodiversity in target geographies.	Baseline, midline, endline

Learning and Review Cycle

The Learning and Review Cycle will provide a structured mechanism for tracking implementation, identifying bottlenecks and adapting priorities based on evidence. It will connect routine national monitoring with regional problem-solving and continental accountability, ensuring lessons translate into timely corrective action and better investment decisions.

- **Quarterly:** National delivery teams will review implementation progress, identify bottlenecks and agree on corrective actions. Regional platforms will address cross-border constraints and facilitate joint learning.
- **Annually:** A concise continental scorecard will link expenditure with outputs and outcomes. Implementing and financing partners will disclose their geographic coverage and crop portfolios to improve transparency, coordination and identification of gaps.
- **2027, 2030 and 2035:** Portfolio reviews will validate strategic priorities, assess inclusion and safeguards, document results and lessons, and use the evidence generated to redirect financing towards effective and scalable interventions.

11. Critical Risks and Responses

Risk	Response
Project fragmentation	Use one country results framework and disclose portfolios through a shared registry.
Commercialization narrows diversity	Maintain portfolio and conservation safeguards; monitor crop/varietal diversity and farmer choice.
Weak demand or unreliable supply	Sequence market pull with seed and production readiness; use procurement and market intelligence.
Benefits bypass farmers/women/youth	Require participation, fair contracts, sex/age-disaggregated metrics and benefit-sharing safeguards.
Donor dependence	Cost recurrent functions explicitly and progressively shift them into domestic budgets and viable services.

12. Conclusion

Africa's opportunity crops represent an important but insufficiently utilized resource for building more diverse, nutritious, climate-resilient and inclusive agrifood systems. Realizing their potential will require more than isolated research projects, conservation initiatives or promotional activities. It demands a coordinated transition that connects crop diversity and local knowledge with science, functional seed systems, sustainable production, processing, enterprise development, markets and consumer demand.

This proposed roadmap provides a practical framework for translating continental commitments into country-led and locally adapted action. Its priorities should be implemented as an integrated portfolio, supported by clearly assigned responsibilities, sustained financing and partnerships involving governments, farmers, research institutions, Indigenous Peoples, businesses, civil society, development partners and consumers. Particular attention must be given to women, youth, smallholders and small and medium-sized enterprises so that they can participate meaningfully and share equitably in the value and benefits created.

Success will ultimately be measured not by the number of projects, meetings or crops documented, but by tangible changes across African food systems: diverse and quality seed reaching farmers; increased and sustainable production; stronger enterprises and markets; improved consumption and dietary diversity; higher and more resilient incomes; and better conservation through use. The results framework and learning cycle will enable countries and partners to monitor these outcomes, address bottlenecks and redirect resources based on evidence.

The task ahead is therefore to move decisively from recognition to implementation. With coordinated leadership, accountable delivery and long-term investment, opportunity crops can become productive and commercially viable components of Africa's agrifood systems, contributing to food and nutrition security, climate resilience, biodiversity conservation and inclusive economic transformation.

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