Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

FARA
Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa

Report of the Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa

Convened by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)

9th - 11th June, 2026

Accra, Ghana

Regional Conference on Progress in Integration of Neglected and Underutilized Crop Species (NUS) into the Food System in Africa

August 2026



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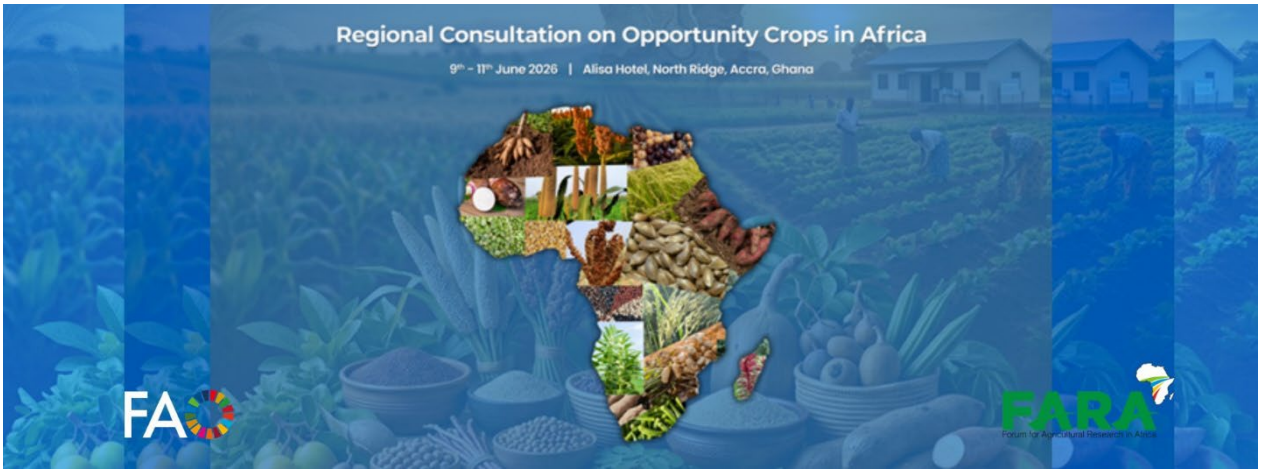
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Editorial note

This report summarizes the presentations, discussions and outcomes of the Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa, convened by FAO and FARA in Accra, Ghana, and online from 9 to 11 June 2026. It is a synthesis, not a verbatim record. Session summaries and key messages give the organizers' account of the discussions; they do not necessarily reflect a consensus of all participants or the positions of their institutions. Speakers' names and affiliations are given as provided at the time of the consultation. The list of participants in Annex 2 covers all participants [in-person]. The extended abstracts of the papers presented are published separately in the Book of Extended Abstracts.

Report *of the* Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa

9–11 June 2026 | Accra, Ghana





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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full name
AATF	African Agricultural Technology Foundation
ACENUB	African Centre of Excellence in Neglected and Underutilized Biodiversity
AICS	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
ALL-IN	Advancing Local Leadership, Innovation and Networks
AOCC	African Orphan Crops Consortium
APBA	African Plant Breeders Association
AfSTA	African Seed Trade Association
ASARECA	Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
AU	African Union
AU-IAPSC	African Union–Inter-African Phytosanitary Council
AUC	African Union Commission
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency–New Partnership for Africa's Development
BUAN	Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources
CATUC	Catholic University of Cameroon
CCARDESA	Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa
CIAT	International Center for Tropical Agriculture
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
CORAF	West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Ghana
CSIR-FRI	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research–Food Research Institute
CSIR-PGRRI	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research–Plant Genetic Resources Research Institute
CSIR-STEPRI	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research–Science and Technology Policy Research Institute
CT	Crop Trust
CTDT-ZW	Community Technology Development Trust–Zimbabwe
DCC	Decade Collaborative Centre
ESAFF	Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers' Forum
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAO-RAF	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations–Regional Office for Africa
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
GBSS	Genetics, Biotechnology and Seed Science Centre
GFAiR	Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation
GWB	Green Without Borders
IAR&T	Institute of Agricultural Research and Training
ICIPE	International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture
JKUAT	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology
KM	Knowledge Management
MoLAFWR	Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, Zimbabwe
MZUNI	Mzuzu University
NARES	National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems
NARO	National Agricultural Research Organization, Uganda
NaSARRI	National Semi-Arid Resources Research Institute
NDU	Niger Delta University
OAU	Obafemi Awolowo University
OPDCC	Ocean Prediction Decade Collaborative Center

PGRI	Plant Genetic Resources Institute
RUFORUM	Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TBC	To Be Confirmed
TBD	To Be Determined
UAC	University of Abomey-Calavi
UG	University of Ghana
UI	University of Ibadan
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNA	National University of Agriculture, Benin
UNIOSUN	Osun State University
VACS	Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils
VSU	Virginia State University
YPARD	Young Professionals for Agricultural Development

List of Speakers

Facilitators

SR	Name	Organization	Designation	Session(s) Chaired
1	Wole Fatunbi	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)	Session Chair	Opening and Welcome; Theme 1; Poster Pitch; Theme 9
2	Mphumuzi Sukati	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)	Session Chair	Themes 2 and 3
3	Arshiya Noorani	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)	Session Chair	Themes 4 and 5
4	Chikelu Mba	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)	Session Chair	Themes 6 and 7
5	Clement Adjorlolo	African Union Development Agency–NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD)	Session Chair	Theme 8

Matrix of Authors/Speakers and Papers

SR	Name	Organizations	Paper title
1	Julia Sibiya	CIMMYT, Nairobi, Kenya	Opportunity Crops for the Transition of African Agrifood Systems
2	Clement Adjorlolo	African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD)	From Policy to Practice: Scaling Opportunity Crops through Coordinated Action
3	Hamid El Bilali and Filippo Acasto	International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM-Bari), Italy; Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), Accra, Ghana	A Transition Framework for Integrating Neglected and Underutilized Species into Agrifood Systems
4	Chikelu Mba and Arshiya Noorani	Plant Production and Protection Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Rome, Italy	Unlocking Africa's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
5	Vincent O. Aduramigba-Modupe	Institute of Agricultural Research and Training, Ibadan, Nigeria	Developing a Specialized Capacity Instrument for NARES and Institutions Advancing Opportunity Crops
6	Moses Odeke	Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA)	Progress on Integration of Opportunity Crops into Agrifood Systems in Eastern and Central Africa
7	N. K. O. Ojijo	Department of Food Science and Technology, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Nairobi, Kenya	From Forgotten Foods to Opportunity Crops: Awareness, Institutional Transformation and the Mainstreaming of Diversified African Food Systems
8	Ndeye Aissatou Diop and Ousmane Ndoye	West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF), Dakar, Senegal	Integrating Opportunity Crops into Agrifood Systems in West and Central Africa: Evidence and Pathways for Scaling Resilient Food Systems

9	Christine Gathecha, Esther Okalany, Monica Kulabako, Upenyu Chipunza, Felix Stepman and Joanna Kane-Potaka	Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAiR); Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM)	Building the First Open-Source Curriculum on Opportunity Crops (Neglected and Underutilized Species): Evidence from a Multi-Regional Network of Universities
10	Nora P. Castaneda-Alvarez and Nico Wilms-Posen	Global Crop Diversity Trust, Bonn, Germany	Opportunity Crops: Strategies to Promote Conservation and Use of Plant Genetic Resources
11	Olaniyi A. Oyatomi	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan, Nigeria	Complementarity of On-Farm Management and Ex Situ Conservation
12	Olakunle Sansa, Olaniyi Oyatomi, Rajneesh Paliwal and Michael Abberton	Genetic Resources Center, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan, Nigeria	Harnessing the Diversity of Opportunity Crops for Resilience
13	Carlo Fadda	Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, Nairobi, Kenya	From Crowdsourced Varieties to Continental Assets: On-Farm Diversity Management as the Foundation for Africa's Opportunity Crop Transformation
14	Hillary Mugiyo and Vimbayi G. P. Chimonyo	University of Zimbabwe; Ministry of Agriculture, Mechanization and Water Resources Development, Zimbabwe; CIMMYT	Using Spatial Targeting to Guide Opportunity Crop Breeding for Climate-Resilient Dryland Agriculture
15	Y. D. Ndirpaya	African Agricultural Technology Foundation, Abuja, Nigeria	Registration of Local Varieties of Opportunity Crops: An Integrated Approach
16	Yacouba Diallo	African Seed Trade Association (AfSTA)	From Forgotten to Formal: Integrating Orphan Crops into Africa's Seed Trade Systems
17	H. O. Alinaitwe, S. Asiimwe, F. Kasule, G. Tusiime, R. Kakeeto, J. C. Aru, S. Ssebulime, L. Migamba, M. Biruma and S. Adikini	Makerere University; National Semi-Arid Resources Research Institute (NaSARRI); Iowa State University; Abi Zonal Agricultural Research and Development Institute, Uganda	Exploration of Stable Blast Resistance in Uganda Finger Millet Germplasm
18	Rita H. Mumm, Howard-Yana Shapiro and Allen Van Deynze	African Orphan Crops Consortium (AOCC)	Strengthening Plant Breeding Capacity for Opportunity Crops in Africa
19	O. Oladeji, I. J. Fasakin and M. A. Owolabi	University of Ilorin; University of Ibadan; Institute for Agricultural Research, Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria	Technical Efficiency of Sorghum Production in Nigeria: Evidence from Stochastic Frontier Analysis
20	Joe Mzinga	Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF)	Mechanization Pathways for Opportunity Crops: Unlocking Smallholder Agriculture Transformation in Eastern and Southern Africa
21	Funmilayo Mary Oloyede	Department of Agronomy, Osun State University, Nigeria	From Neglect to Value: Unlocking Nigeria's Opportunity Crops

22	Ousmane Ndoye and Emmanuel Njukwe	West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF), Dakar, Senegal	Creating Novel Research, Development and Networking Pathways to Advance Agronomic Practices for Opportunity Crops
23	Omoboluwape Diekade, Esther Uchendu, Benjamin Faloye, Hapson Mushoriwa, Chiedozie Egesi, Alejandro Ortega-Beltran and Michael Abberton	University of Ibadan; International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Nigeria	Distribution and Yield Impact of Taro Leaf Blight in Nigeria: Evidence from Farm-Level Analysis
24	Abosede Olawumi Benedict	GROW West Africa	Local Producers' Capacity Building in Opportunity Crops: Integration and Agroecology Transition in Africa
25	Andrew Egala	Green Without Borders, Kenya	Seeds of Resilience: Market Opportunities in Neglected and Underutilized Cereal and Grain Crops in Africa
26	Samuel Lamptey, Kwesi Firibu Saalia, John Ofosu-Anim and Gloria L. Essilfie	Department of Crop Science and Department of Food Science, University of Ghana	Nutritional Quality and Consumer Acceptability of Turkey Berry Composite Tea
27	Comfort Owusu and Ekpor Anyimah-Ackah	Faculty of Health, Allied Sciences and Home Economics Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana	Turkey Berry Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Product Development for Pregnancy Anaemia Prevention
28	Ethelyn Echep Forchibe, Glenn-Neuville Akwenui, Akwa Nerine Kecha and Ignatius Azeteh	University of Bertoua; Catholic University of Cameroon; University of Lome; University of Bamenda	Diversity and Consumer Perception of Neglected and Underutilized Crops in the North West Region of Cameroon
29	D. T. Uchi, A. Tor and D. D. Iyough	OceanPrediction Decade Collaborative Centre; Federal Polytechnic Wannune; Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi, Nigeria	Integrating Neglected and Underutilized Crop Species into Food Systems: Opportunities for Population Nutrition and Food Security
30	Marius Affonfere, Flora Josiane Chadare, Yann Emeric Madode, Finagnon Toyi Kevin Fassinou, Gudrun B. Keding and Paulin Azokpota	National University of Agriculture, Benin; University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin; University of Goettingen, Germany	Physicochemical and Mineral Profile of Cochlospermum spp. Root Powder: A Neglected and Underutilized Species in the Sudanian Zone of Benin

Executive Summary

Repositioning Opportunity Crops to Enhance Resilience, Nutrition, and Sustainability in African Agrifood Systems

Africa possesses exceptional agricultural biodiversity, much of which remains underutilized despite its significant potential to enhance food security, nutrition, climate resilience, and livelihoods. In response to challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, malnutrition, and increasing pressure on food systems, the Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa examined how indigenous and traditionally cultivated crops can contribute more effectively to the continent's agrifood transformation.

The three-day consultation convened researchers, policymakers, universities, development partners, farmer organizations, private-sector actors, and regional institutions. Through presentations, panel discussions, working groups, and plenary dialogue, participants reviewed evidence, shared experiences, and identified practical actions to advance opportunity crops across Africa.

A key outcome was consensus that the term **"Opportunity Crops"** better communicates the strategic potential of these species than labels such as "orphan" or "neglected" crops. Participants acknowledged that language shapes perception, policy attention, and investment. These crops should therefore be positioned as valuable assets for diversified, resilient, and nutrition-sensitive agrifood systems.

Opportunity crops provide multiple benefits. Many of these crops tolerate drought, heat, and marginal production environments, while offering high nutritional value and supporting agricultural biodiversity. Broader utilization can diversify production and diets, enhance climate resilience, create new market opportunities, and reduce dependence on a limited range of globally dominant staple crops.

However, conservation alone is insufficient. Realizing these benefits requires coordinated investment across the innovation ecosystem, encompassing plant genetic resources, crop improvement, inclusive seed systems, value addition, market development, higher education, capacity strengthening, enabling policies, and sustained public and private financing.

Participants emphasized the interdependence of these components. Breeding relies on conserved genetic resources, seed systems depend on improved varieties, markets require reliable production, and sustained investment is contingent upon supportive policies and institutional coordination. Systems-based approaches are therefore necessary to strengthen both individual components and their linkages across opportunity crop value chains.

The dialogue also addressed the relationships between formal and community seed systems, commercialization and farmer choice, public and private-sector responsibilities, and mechanisms for continental collaboration. Despite differing perspectives, participants supported balanced approaches that reflect the diversity of African agricultural systems and encourage both innovation and investment.

The consultation concluded that Africa already possesses much of the necessary scientific, technical, and institutional capacity. The principal challenge is to improve coordination, scale successful initiatives, and translate existing knowledge into widespread implementation. Working groups identified seven strategic priorities:

- Strengthen the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources.
- Accelerate research, innovation and crop improvement.
- Build inclusive and resilient seed systems.
- Develop competitive value chains and markets.
- Create enabling policy and investment environments.
- Strengthen higher education and capacity development.
- Promote continental collaboration and institutional coordination.

Opportunity crops should be integrated into broader agricultural, nutrition, biodiversity, and climate strategies rather than treated as isolated initiatives. Governments, research institutions, universities, development partners, private enterprises, and farmer organizations all have essential roles to play.

The consultation established a shared continental vision and a commitment to move beyond fragmented projects toward coordinated action. It provided a common understanding of the challenges, practical pathways for implementation, and stronger partnerships for future collaboration.

The task is no longer to demonstrate the importance of opportunity crops, but to translate this vision into sustained investment, coordinated implementation, and measurable impact. The goal is to transform underutilized crops into drivers of agricultural innovation, economic opportunity, and resilient African agrifood systems.

Proceedings of the Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa

9–11 June 2026 | Accra, Ghana

Convened by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

and the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)

Background

This document summarizes the deliberations, presentations, discussions, and outcomes of the Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa, convened from 9 to 11 June 2026 in Accra, Ghana. The consultation assembled researchers, policymakers, development practitioners, private sector representatives, farmer organizations, universities, international organizations, and development partners to identify practical pathways for integrating opportunity crops into Africa's agrifood systems.

The report is not a verbatim record of presentations; rather, it synthesizes technical evidence, institutional experiences, and participant reflections from the three-day consultation. The document captures both the knowledge presented and the collective insights that emerged through dialogue, debate, and collaborative reflection.

The report is organized chronologically, reflecting the flow of discussion over the three days. It captures important debates, differing perspectives, and consensus. Collectively, the proceedings offer a comprehensive record of the consultation and serve as a forward-looking resource for governments, research institutions, universities, development partners, private sector actors, and farmer organizations aiming to advance opportunity crops as strategic assets for resilient, nutritious, and sustainable agrifood systems across Africa.

Africa possesses some of the world's most extensive reserves of agricultural biodiversity. For generations, hundreds of indigenous and traditionally cultivated crops have contributed to food security, nutrition, cultural identity, and resilient livelihoods. Despite their adaptability to diverse agroecological conditions and significant nutritional value, many of these crops remain marginalized within agricultural research, policy, investment, and commercial systems.

Challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, food and nutrition insecurity, environmental degradation, and reliance on a limited number of globally traded staples have renewed interest in these species. Increasingly referred to as "opportunity crops," they are now recognized as strategic resources for developing more diversified, resilient, and inclusive agrifood systems.

Unlocking the potential of these crops requires coordinated action across multiple sectors. Enhanced conservation and breeding programs, effective seed systems, supportive policies, market development, private-sector engagement, increased consumer awareness, and sustained investment in research and innovation are essential to transition opportunity crops from localized production to integration within national and regional food systems.

In response, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in partnership with the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), convened the Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa. This consultation served as a continental platform for stakeholders to review evidence, share experiences, identify constraints, and develop

recommendations to strengthen the conservation, utilization, and commercialization of opportunity crops.

Over the three-day consultation, participants examined the scientific, policy, institutional, and market dimensions of opportunity crops and identified practical pathways for integrating them into broader food-system transformation strategies. Discussions highlighted the need to reposition these crops from the periphery of agricultural development to the center of investments in resilient, nutrition-sensitive, and climate-smart agriculture.

Consultation Objectives

The Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa sought to establish a unified continental vision for positioning opportunity crops as strategic contributors to resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

Specifically, the consultation aimed to:

1. Review existing knowledge, evidence, and experiences related to opportunity crops across Africa.
2. Identify scientific, technical, institutional, and policy constraints to the broader adoption and utilization of opportunity crops.
3. Explore opportunities to enhance conservation, breeding, seed systems, value chains, and markets for opportunity crops.
4. Facilitate dialogue among governments, research institutions, universities, development partners, private-sector actors, and farmer organizations.
5. Promote partnerships and investment in the development and commercialization of opportunity crops.
6. Develop practical recommendations and priority actions to guide future national and continental initiatives.

Consultation Design

The consultation adopted a hybrid format, combining in-person participation in Accra, Ghana, with virtual engagement from across Africa and internationally. Over three days, participants contributed through keynote presentations, technical sessions, panel discussions, plenary dialogues, thematic working groups, and collaborative reflection.

The program began by establishing the rationale for opportunity crops and examining their scientific and institutional foundations. It then focused on identifying practical pathways for scaling conservation, breeding, seed systems, markets, and policy support. The final day consolidated these discussions into strategic priorities and recommendations for action at national, regional, and continental levels.

This approach enabled participants to exchange knowledge and experiences, collectively shaping an emerging agenda to advance opportunity crops within the broader transformation of Africa's agrifood systems.

Day 1: Setting the Foundation: Reimagining Opportunity Crops for Africa's Agrifood Systems

Key Messages from Day One

- Opportunity crops are strategic assets for advancing Africa's food security, nutrition, climate resilience, biodiversity and rural livelihoods.
- Africa's rich agricultural biodiversity should be treated as productive capital for innovation and economic transformation, not merely as a resource for conservation.
- Replacing labels such as "Forgotten," "orphan" and "neglected" with **"opportunity crops"** can positively influence public perception, policy attention and investment.
- Diversifying production beyond a narrow range of major staples will reduce vulnerability to climate shocks, market disruptions and geopolitical instability.
- Science, modern breeding, genomics and evidence-based innovation are essential for translating the potential of opportunity crops into practical benefits.
- Conservation, crop improvement, seed systems, value addition, markets and policy support must operate as an interconnected innovation ecosystem.
- Opportunity crops should complement major staples and be mainstreamed into agricultural, nutrition, biodiversity, climate and economic-development strategies.
- Coordinated partnerships among governments, researchers, universities, farmers, development partners and the private sector are essential for scaling successful initiatives.
- The agenda must move from advocacy and fragmented projects to sustained investment, institutional commitments and coordinated continental action.

Introduction to Day One

The opening day of the Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa established the intellectual and strategic foundation for the three-day consultation. Bringing together scientists, policymakers, development practitioners, private sector representatives, universities, farmers' organizations and international partners, the day sought to build a common understanding of why opportunity crops deserve renewed attention within Africa's agrifood transformation agenda.

The discussions challenged the long-held perceptions that have confined many indigenous and underutilized crops to the margins of agricultural research and investment. Participants were invited to reconsider these crops not as relics of traditional farming systems or emergency foods, but as strategic assets capable of addressing some of Africa's most pressing development challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, malnutrition, fragile food systems and rural poverty.

Throughout the day, presenters demonstrated that many opportunity crops possess characteristics that make them particularly relevant to contemporary food systems. These include tolerance to drought and other climatic stresses, high nutritional value, adaptation to local production environments, cultural significance, and considerable untapped commercial potential. At the same time, speakers acknowledged that realizing this potential requires deliberate investments in research, breeding, conservation, policy reform, seed systems, market development and consumer awareness.

While individual presentations focused on different dimensions of opportunity crops, a consistent message emerged: Africa possesses an extraordinary wealth of agricultural biodiversity, yet much of this diversity remains insufficiently researched, inadequately

conserved and largely excluded from formal agricultural development pathways. Unlocking this potential would require coordinated action across institutions, disciplines and sectors.

The first day therefore served not merely as an introduction to the consultation, but as an invitation to rethink the role of opportunity crops within Africa's future food systems.

Session 1: Setting the Stage for Africa's Opportunity Crops Agenda

The Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa commenced with high-level remarks from leaders representing continental agricultural research, international development and national government. Collectively, the speakers emphasized that Africa's agricultural future depends not only on increasing productivity but also on embracing crop diversity as a strategic pathway towards food security, nutrition, climate resilience and sustainable economic development.

While each speaker addressed the consultation from a different institutional perspective, their messages converged around a common theme; "***the time has come to reposition opportunity crops from the margins of agricultural discourse to the center of Africa's agrifood transformation agenda***"

Opening Remarks

Dr. Abebe Haile-Gabriel speaking on behalf of FAO positioned the consultation within the broader context of Africa's agrifood systems transformation. He observed that while the continent possesses an extraordinary diversity of indigenous and traditional crops, many remain underutilized despite their immense potential to improve nutrition, strengthen climate resilience, conserve biodiversity and support rural livelihoods. He argued that unlocking this potential requires moving beyond isolated interventions toward integrated investments in research, seed systems, value chains, policy reform and consumer awareness. Drawing on FAO's "Four Betters" framework, he challenged participants to transform opportunity crops from overlooked resources into strategic assets for Africa's future.

> ***"Our indigenous and traditional crops are not relics of the past; they are resources for the future. It is therefore high time that we joined forces to unlock their full potential."***

Speaking on behalf of FARA, **Dr. Aggrey Agumya** reflected on Africa's evolving journey from discussions around "forgotten foods" and "orphan crops" to the more strategic framing of **opportunity crops**. He reaffirmed FARA's long-standing commitment to science, partnerships and evidence-based policy dialogue, emphasizing that the continent's agricultural transformation must be grounded in robust research, innovation and collaboration. He also highlighted the immense opportunities these crops present for youth entrepreneurship, rural transformation and wealth creation, while calling on participants to move beyond isolated success stories towards concrete commitments in policy, financing and institutional collaboration.

> ***"Science must remain at the center of this transformation. Opportunity crops cannot move from promise to prosperity through sentiment alone."***

Representing the Government of Ghana on behalf of the **Hon. Eric Opoku**, **Hon. John Dumelo** reaffirmed the country's commitment to advancing opportunity crops as part of broader efforts to build resilient and inclusive agrifood systems. He highlighted Ghana's investments in research on indigenous crops such as fonio and taro, as well as initiatives to strengthen value addition and commercialization. Stressing that opportunity crops represent "crops for the future," he called for collective action among governments, research institutions, development partners and the private sector to mainstream these crops within national and continental development agendas while ensuring that women and young people benefit from emerging opportunities.

> ***"Our experience confirms that opportunity crops are not just crops; they are crops for the future. They represent an opportunity to build food systems that are more diverse, more resilient, more inclusive and better adapted to the realities of climate***



Dr. Aggrey Agumya, Executive Director, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA).



Hon. John Dumelo, Deputy Minister for Food and Agriculture, Republic of Ghana



Dr. Abebe Haile-Gabriel, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Africa, FAO.

A Shared Vision

Although delivered from different institutional perspectives, the opening addresses converged on a common message: Africa possesses the biological resources, scientific expertise, and institutional partnerships needed to reposition opportunity crops as strategic contributors to resilient, nutritious, and sustainable agrifood systems.

The speakers collectively emphasized that the continent's indigenous and traditionally cultivated crops should no longer be viewed as marginal or underutilized species, but as valuable assets capable of strengthening food security, improving nutrition, enhancing climate resilience, conserving biodiversity, and creating new economic opportunities. Realizing this potential, however, will require coordinated investments in research, conservation, crop improvement, seed systems, value chains, policy reform and public awareness.

The opening session also underscored the fact that transforming opportunity crops from promise to practice cannot be achieved by any single institution acting alone. Governments, research organizations, universities, development partners, the private sector and farming communities all have complementary roles to play in creating the enabling environment needed for these crops to thrive. Collaboration, innovation and sustained commitment emerged as recurring keywords throughout the opening addresses.

Together, these messages established both the ambition and the direction of the consultation. They challenged participants to move beyond recognizing the value of opportunity crops to identifying practical actions that could integrate them into Africa's broader agenda for agrifood systems transformation. This shared vision would provide the foundation for the technical discussions and deliberations of the following three days.

Session 2: Reframing Opportunity Crops: From Neglect to Strategic Opportunity

Session Overview

The second session introduced one of the consultation's central themes: the need to fundamentally reframe how Africa perceives its indigenous and traditionally cultivated crops.

Presentations challenged the long-standing narrative that labels these species as "orphan" or "neglected" crops. Instead, speakers argued that many of these crops represent underutilized assets whose apparent marginalization reflects historical underinvestment rather than biological limitations.

Evidence presented throughout the session showed that these crops contribute significantly to nutrition, climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and rural livelihoods, yet remain largely absent from mainstream agricultural research portfolios, commercial seed systems, and investment strategies.

Key Messages

Presenters emphasized that Africa possesses exceptional agricultural biodiversity, including dozens of domesticated species with demonstrated resilience and nutritional value. However, global food systems continue to rely heavily on a small number of staple crops, increasing vulnerability to climate shocks and market disruptions.

Participants were encouraged to shift the policy conversation from conserving these crops solely as elements of cultural heritage towards recognizing them as productive economic assets capable of supporting resilient and diversified food systems.

Several presenters also illustrated how recurring global crises, including food price shocks, supply chain disruptions, and geopolitical instability, have exposed the risks of excessive dependence on imported staple crops and agricultural inputs. Opportunity crops were therefore presented as important components of future food system resilience. In short form;

- Africa's indigenous crops represent strategic productive assets rather than marginal species.
- Diversifying food systems strengthens resilience to climate, economic and geopolitical shocks.
- Language influences investment, policy and public perception.

Session 3: Africa's Opportunity Crops: Biodiversity as the Foundation for Resilient Agrifood Systems

Session Overview

Building on the conceptual framing established earlier in the day, the third session examined the scientific basis for repositioning Africa's opportunity crops within contemporary agrifood systems. Drawing on evidence from plant science, agrobiodiversity research, crop improvement programs and regional initiatives, presenters demonstrated that Africa possesses an exceptional reservoir of plant genetic diversity capable of addressing many of the continent's emerging food system challenges.

The session challenged participants to reconsider biodiversity not simply as an environmental resource requiring protection, but as productive capital that can drive agricultural innovation, strengthen climate resilience, improve nutrition and create new economic opportunities. Throughout the presentations, speakers argued that the greatest constraint facing many opportunity crops is not their biological potential but the historical underinvestment in their research, improvement and commercialization.

Key Messages

A recurring message throughout the session was that Africa's dependence on a relatively small number of globally traded staple crops has increased vulnerability to climate shocks, market disruptions and geopolitical instability. Presenters noted that many indigenous crops have inherent tolerance to drought, poor soils, pests, and diseases, while offering superior nutritional profiles compared with several widely cultivated staples.

Rather than treating these crops primarily as heritage resources, participants were encouraged to view them as strategic investments that can support more diversified, resilient, and competitive agrifood systems. Several speakers argued that the transition from conservation to utilization requires a shift in thinking from preserving biodiversity for its own sake to mobilizing biodiversity as an engine for innovation, livelihoods, and economic transformation.

The presentations also highlighted the growing body of scientific evidence supporting the improvement of opportunity crops through plant breeding, genomic research and modern crop improvement approaches. Significant advances have already been achieved for crops such as Bambara groundnut, African yam bean, taro and several indigenous cereals, demonstrating that these species can respond successfully to systematic research investment.

Beyond crop improvement, presenters emphasized the need to strengthen entire innovation systems, linking conservation, characterization, breeding, seed systems, market development and policy support into a coherent continuum rather than treating them as isolated interventions.

> ***"The question is no longer whether these crops have potential. The question is whether our investment architecture is prepared to recognize that***

Participants broadly welcomed evidence demonstrating the untapped value of Africa's agricultural biodiversity. Discussions reinforced the importance of

investing in indigenous crop species before climate change and genetic erosion further reduce available diversity.

Several participants also observed that opportunity crops should not be positioned against major staple crops. Instead, they should complement existing production systems by expanding farmers' options, strengthening resilience and creating new livelihood opportunities.

Attention was also drawn to the need for stronger coordination among researchers, breeders, policymakers and investors to accelerate the transition from scientific discovery to practical application.

One of the most thought-provoking discussions during the session challenged the traditional framing of biodiversity conservation. Participants argued that conservation alone cannot sustain opportunity crops unless accompanied by deliberate investment in research, seed systems, value addition and markets. Several contributors suggested that Africa's agricultural biodiversity should increasingly be regarded as productive capital capable of generating economic, nutritional and environmental returns. This perspective represented an important shift in emphasis. Rather than viewing conservation and commercialization as competing priorities, participants increasingly saw them as mutually reinforcing. Investments that increase the utilization and market value of opportunity crops can, when appropriately designed, also strengthen incentives for their continued conservation and improvement. In short,

- Modern breeding and genomic tools are opening new opportunities for crop improvement.
- Conservation, research, seed systems, markets and policy should be viewed as interconnected components of a single innovation ecosystem.
- Greater investment is required to unlock the full potential of Africa's indigenous crop diversity.

Session 4: Building Momentum: Partnerships, Policy and the Continental Agenda for Opportunity Crops

Session Overview

Presentations and discussions during this session highlighted the importance of collective action in advancing opportunity crops. While research institutions continue to generate valuable scientific knowledge, participants acknowledged that research alone cannot deliver widespread adoption. Coordinated engagement among governments, regional organizations, universities, development partners, farmers' organizations and the private sector will be essential if opportunity crops are to move from isolated initiatives to mainstream agricultural development.

Several speakers reflected on existing regional and global initiatives supporting agricultural biodiversity and emphasized the need to better align these efforts. Rather than creating parallel programs, participants advocated for stronger coordination, shared learning and complementary investments capable of accelerating progress across the continent. Scientific evidence alone cannot transform food systems. Translating the potential of opportunity crops

into meaningful impact requires enabling policies, institutional leadership, strategic partnerships and sustained investment.

The session also explored the evolving policy environment surrounding opportunity crops. Discussions highlighted opportunities to integrate these species more deliberately into national agricultural strategies, climate adaptation plans, nutrition policies and regional development frameworks, thereby positioning them as contributors to multiple development objectives rather than stand-alone interventions.

Key Messages

A recurring message throughout the session was that opportunity crops should no longer be viewed as a specialized area of agricultural research. Instead, they should become integral components of broader strategies aimed at strengthening food system resilience, improving nutrition, conserving biodiversity and stimulating rural economic development.

Participants emphasized that successful transformation would depend upon institutional collaboration. Governments were encouraged to create enabling policy environments, while research institutions were challenged to generate actionable evidence and accelerate innovation. Development partners were called upon to support long-term investments, and the private sector was identified as a critical partner in developing sustainable seed systems, processing industries and markets. Another important message concerned communication. Several contributors observed that many opportunity crops continue to suffer from outdated perceptions that associate them with poverty, food insecurity or subsistence farming. Participants therefore stressed the importance of strategic communication, public awareness and consumer education to reposition these crops as modern, nutritious and commercially viable products capable of meeting contemporary consumer preferences.

Discussions also highlighted the importance of involving young researchers, universities and emerging scientists in future programs. Participants observed that sustaining momentum beyond the consultation would require building the next generation of researchers, breeders, entrepreneurs and policymakers capable of championing opportunity crops within their respective institutions.

The need for stronger links between scientific research and policy development also featured prominently. Participants encouraged researchers to communicate findings in ways that support evidence-informed policymaking while ensuring that policy priorities continue to inform future research agendas.

An important discussion emerged around the influence of public narratives on agricultural investment. Participants noted that language, communication, and public perception significantly shape the willingness of policymakers, consumers, and investors to support opportunity crops. Several contributors argued that changing perceptions requires more than technical evidence. Success will depend upon demonstrating tangible benefits to farmers, consumers, and businesses while showcasing successful examples from across the continent. Participants therefore encouraged stronger communication strategies that present opportunity crops as solutions for healthier diets, resilient farming systems, and competitive agricultural enterprises rather than as crops of last resort. In short,

- Opportunity crops should be integrated into broader agricultural, nutrition and climate policies.
- Stronger partnerships are required across research, government, development and private-sector institutions.
- Effective communication will be essential for changing perceptions and stimulating demand.
- Young scientists and future leaders should be central to the long-term opportunity crops agenda.
- Coordinated continental action offers significant opportunities to accelerate progress while avoiding duplication.

Spotlight - Poster Pitch Session: Showcasing the Next Generation of Opportunity Crop Researchers

One distinctive feature of the consultation was a poster pitching session involving early-career researchers from universities and research institutions across Africa. Beyond presenting scientific findings, the session was designed as a professional development exercise that challenged participants to communicate complex research ideas clearly, concisely, and persuasively within a limited time.

Each presenter was allocated five minutes to introduce their research before engaging with participants during the poster exhibition. The exercise gave young scientists an opportunity to receive feedback from senior researchers, practitioners, and policymakers while refining their scientific communication skills.



Image 2: *Early career researchers presenting their work during the poster pitch session.*

The posters reflected the diversity of ongoing research on opportunity crops, covering themes such as crop improvement, conservation, value addition, nutrition, seed systems and climate resilience. Together, they demonstrated the growing interest among Africa's emerging researchers in developing innovative solutions for resilient agrifood systems.

In introducing the session, the organizers emphasized that strengthening Africa's food systems requires not only scientific discovery but also the ability to communicate research effectively to diverse audiences. The poster pitches therefore served as an investment in the next generation of African scientists, equipping them with skills that extend beyond the laboratory and into policy, practice and public engagement.

Day 2: From Potential to Practice, Building the Scientific, Institutional and Commercial Foundations for Opportunity Crops

Key Messages from Day Two

- Opportunity crops require an integrated innovation system linking genetic-resource conservation, breeding, seed delivery, markets, supportive policies and sustained investment.
- Conservation must be treated as the beginning of innovation, with genetic resources properly characterized, documented and made accessible for crop improvement and sustainable use.
- Breeding programs should combine modern genomic and digital tools with farmers' knowledge to deliver productive, climate-resilient, nutritious and locally preferred varieties.
- Inclusive seed systems should connect formal, community-based and farmer-managed approaches while safeguarding seed quality, crop diversity and farmers' choices.
- Commercialization must be built on viable business cases, value addition, consumer awareness, quality standards and inclusive value chains that benefit both smallholders and agribusinesses.
- Opportunity crops must move from isolated projects into national and regional agrifood strategies supported by coherent policies, coordinated institutions, public–private partnerships and long-term financing.

Introduction to Day Two

Day Two moved the conversation from recognizing the potential of Africa's opportunity crops to identifying the systems required to translate that potential into meaningful impact. The discussions were guided by a central question: How can Africa build the scientific, institutional and commercial systems needed to unlock the full potential of these crops?

The sessions examined the entire innovation pathway from conserving and characterizing plant genetic resources to developing climate-resilient varieties and ensuring that quality seeds reach farmers through effective community-based and formal seed systems. Attention was also given to the policy and regulatory reforms needed to stimulate innovation, expand markets, attract private-sector participation and mobilize sustainable financing.

"Opportunity crops will only contribute meaningfully to Africa's agrifood transformation if investments extend beyond conservation to encompass breeding, seed systems, markets, policy and institutional collaboration".

A clear message emerged: conservation alone is not enough. Opportunity crops can contribute meaningfully to Africa's agrifood transformation only when conservation is connected to breeding, seed delivery, value-chain development and consumer demand. Achieving this will require coherent policies, capable institutions, sustained investment and strong collaboration among researchers, governments, farmers, communities and private-sector actors. Day Two therefore focused on building an integrated pathway through which Africa's rich crop diversity can generate resilience, nutrition, livelihoods and economic opportunity.

Session 5: Conserving Africa's Genetic Wealth

Session Overview

Africa's diverse plant genetic resources are the foundation for developing opportunity crops that support resilient, productive and nutritious agrifood systems. However, many indigenous species remain poorly represented in research, gene banks and national development strategies, limiting their use in breeding and adaptation to climate change, pests and evolving market demands.

Conservation must therefore extend beyond storing seeds. It should include systematic collection, characterization, evaluation and documentation to identify valuable traits such as drought tolerance, nutritional quality, pest resistance and adaptability. Conserved materials must also be accessible to researchers, breeders and farming communities for crop improvement and sustainable production.

International, regional and national gene banks have complementary roles in safeguarding genetic diversity, while international agreements and germplasm-exchange mechanisms can strengthen responsible access and collaboration. Greater investment is also needed in scientific infrastructure, young researchers and technical capacity for long-term genetic-resource management.

The central message is clear: conservation is not an endpoint but the beginning of an innovation pathway connecting genetic resources with breeding, seed systems, markets and farmer adoption. Protecting and using Africa's crop diversity is therefore an investment in future food security, climate resilience and economic opportunity.

"Conservation is not simply about protecting the past it is about expanding the options available for the future."

- Plant genetic resources underpin all future opportunities for crop development.
- Conservation and utilization should be pursued as complementary objectives.
- Greater investment is needed in collecting, characterizing and documenting opportunity crops.
- Collaboration among national, regional and international conservation programs should be strengthened.
- Genetic diversity represents a strategic resource for climate resilience, nutrition and agricultural innovation.

Session 6: Breeding for Resilience

Overview

The session examined how plant breeding can unlock the potential of opportunity crops to strengthen Africa's food security, nutrition and climate resilience. Many indigenous crops already possess valuable characteristics, including drought tolerance, nutritional quality and adaptation to marginal environments. However, deliberate investment is required to improve

their productivity, quality, market suitability and responsiveness to farmers' and consumers' needs.

Participants highlighted progress in germplasm characterization, genomics, phenotyping, climate modeling and data management. These advances can accelerate the identification and development of varieties suited to diverse agroecological conditions. The session also emphasized that successful breeding must extend beyond laboratories by actively involving farmers, researchers, universities, national programs and private-sector actors.

Key Messages

- Breeding objectives should extend beyond yield to include climate resilience, nutritional quality, pest resistance, market demand and farmer preferences.
- Modern genomic, digital and climate-analytical tools can accelerate crop improvement and help anticipate future production challenges.
- Farmers' knowledge and participation are essential for setting breeding priorities, evaluating varieties and improving adoption.
- Breeding programs should connect conservation, seed systems and markets to ensure that improved varieties reach farmers and benefit consumers.
- Africa must expand its breeding capacity through stronger institutions, trained scientists, collaborative programs and sustained financing.

Breeding is critical to transforming opportunity crops into competitive components of Africa's agrifood systems. Its success will depend on combining scientific innovation with farmer knowledge, institutional collaboration and market needs. Long-term investment in breeding capacity is therefore essential to produce varieties that are productive, nutritious, climate-resilient and widely adopted while preserving Africa's valuable crop diversity.

Session 7: Strengthening Seed Systems

Overview

The session examined how inclusive, resilient and efficient seed systems can deliver improved opportunity crop varieties to farmers while safeguarding crop diversity and farmer choice. Participants emphasized that advances in conservation and breeding will have limited impact unless farmers can access quality seed that is affordable, timely and appropriate to their production conditions.

Formal seed systems, community seed banks and farmer-managed networks were recognized as complementary components of Africa's seed landscape. While formal systems support quality assurance, certification and commercial distribution, community-based systems conserve locally adapted varieties, facilitate seed exchange and preserve indigenous knowledge. Stronger connections among these systems are therefore essential for expanding seed access and strengthening resilience.

Key Messages

- Effective seed systems provide the critical link between conservation, breeding, farmer adoption and agricultural transformation.
- Formal and farmer-managed seed systems should complement one another to improve seed access, quality and diversity.
- Community seed banks are living conservation systems that strengthen local seed security, preserve adapted varieties and sustain traditional knowledge.
- Policy and regulatory reforms should simplify variety registration and certification while accommodating indigenous crops and smallholder realities.
- Greater public and private investment is needed in seed multiplication, quality assurance, distribution networks and institutional capacity.
- Farmers must retain meaningful choices in accessing, saving, exchanging and improving seed.

Scaling opportunity crops require seed systems that combine the strengths of commercial, community-based and farmer-managed approaches. The priority is not to promote one system over another, but to create flexible and enabling arrangements that improve seed quality and availability without undermining crop diversity or farmer autonomy. Strengthening these systems will ensure that improved varieties reach farmers and contribute to productivity, resilience, food security and livelihoods.

Session 8: Creating Markets for Opportunity Crops

Overview

The session examined how opportunity crops can be transformed into commercially viable products that generate income, strengthen livelihoods and attract sustainable investment. Participants emphasized that conservation, breeding and seed systems will achieve limited impact unless farmers have reliable and profitable markets for their produce.

Several opportunity crops have strong potential in domestic, regional and international markets, particularly as demand grows for nutritious, climate-resilient and naturally gluten-free foods. However, fragmented value chains, limited processing capacity, inconsistent quality standards, weak market information and poor logistics continue to constrain commercialization.

Developing sustainable markets will require coordinated investment across the value chain—from production and aggregation to processing, certification, branding, distribution and consumer awareness.

Key Messages

- Opportunity crops need compelling business cases based on demonstrated demand, profitability and opportunities for value addition.
- Processing crops into flour, snacks, beverages, cereals and health products can increase their value and diversify markets.

- Reliable production, consistent quality standards, certification, logistics and market information are essential for attracting private investment.
- Consumer education and strategic branding can reposition opportunity crops from subsistence foods to nutritious, climate-smart and premium products.
- Harmonized standards and stronger regional cooperation can expand intra-African trade and improve market access.
- Commercialization must remain inclusive, ensuring that smallholder farmers, processors and local enterprises share the benefits.

Strong markets are not simply the endpoint of opportunity crop value chains; they are powerful drivers of production, innovation and conservation. Building inclusive and competitive markets will require coordinated action by governments, researchers, financial institutions, farmers and private-sector actors. By strengthening value addition, branding, quality assurance and regional trade, Africa can transform opportunity crops into profitable products that generate livelihoods, attract investment and support sustainable agrifood systems.

Session 9: Enabling Environment for Transformation

Overview

The session examined the policy, institutional and investment conditions required to mainstream opportunity crops within Africa's agrifood systems. Participants recognized that scientific advances, improved varieties and functioning markets cannot achieve transformation without coherent policies, coordinated institutions and sustained financing.

Major constraints include fragmented policies, inconsistent regulations, weak institutional coordination and dependence on short-term project funding. Participants therefore called for opportunity crops to be integrated into national agricultural plans, food and nutrition strategies, biodiversity policies, climate-adaptation frameworks and regional programs.

The session advocated a shift from isolated projects towards integrated innovation ecosystems connecting research, education, seed systems, extension, finance, markets and farmer participation.

Key Messages

- Opportunity crops should be embedded in national and regional agricultural, nutrition, biodiversity and climate strategies.
- Policy coherence and harmonized regulations are essential for reducing barriers and encouraging research, production, trade and investment.
- Investments should support complete innovation ecosystems rather than isolated or short-term interventions.

- Public financing remains essential for research, conservation, breeding and capacity development, while private investment is needed to drive commercialization and scale.
- Stronger coordination among governments, research institutions, universities, development partners, financial institutions and businesses can reduce duplication and accelerate progress.
- Regional and South–South cooperation should strengthen knowledge exchange, policy learning and coordinated investment, supported by measurable indicators of scientific and socioeconomic impact.

Transforming opportunity crops requires moving from fragmented projects to coherent, long-term systems. Sustained political commitment, enabling policies, coordinated institutions and blended public–private investment must connect science with seed delivery, markets and farmer adoption. Rather than creating additional institutions, Africa should strengthen collaboration among existing platforms and embed opportunity crops within wider development priorities. Institutional transformation is therefore as important as scientific innovation in converting their potential into lasting benefits for farmers, consumers and economies.

Day 3: From Dialogue to Direction, Shaping Africa's Roadmap for Opportunity Crops

Key Messages from Day Three

- Opportunity crops have moved beyond an emerging research interest to become a strategic continental agenda for food security, nutrition, climate resilience, biodiversity and livelihoods.
- Africa must shift from dialogue and awareness-building to coordinated implementation that delivers measurable outcomes at national, regional and continental levels.
- The emerging roadmap should integrate conservation, breeding, seed systems, markets, education, policy, capacity development and investment as interconnected components of one transformation agenda.
- Continental collaboration is essential, particularly in research, germplasm exchange, higher education, policy harmonization, market development and knowledge sharing.
- Coordination should strengthen existing institutions, networks and centres of excellence rather than create additional structures or duplicate ongoing initiatives.
- Sustaining momentum will require shared ownership, long-term financing, political commitment, a continental community of practice and mechanisms for periodically monitoring progress and exchanging lessons.

Introduction to Day Three

Day Three moved the consultation from knowledge exchange to collective priority-setting and coordinated action. Building on the previous discussions on the importance of opportunity crops and the scientific, institutional and commercial systems required to advance them, participants focused on translating the consultation's insights into a practical continental agenda.

Working-group deliberations and plenary sessions brought together perspectives from research institutions, universities, governments, development organizations, farmer groups and the private sector. Participants consolidated areas of agreement, identified strategic priorities and considered mechanisms for sustained collaboration at national, regional and continental levels.

The discussions recognized that opportunity crops cannot be advanced through isolated projects or institutions. Their contribution to food security, nutrition, climate resilience, biodiversity conservation and livelihoods depends on coordinated interventions across conservation, breeding, seed systems, markets, policy, capacity development and investment.

Day Three therefore centered on shaping an Africa Roadmap for Opportunity Crops, strengthening institutional partnerships and building shared ownership of future implementation. It marked not merely the conclusion of the consultation, but the beginning of a coordinated effort to translate knowledge into action and partnerships into measurable, long-term impact.

Session 10: Reflecting on the Journey

The session consolidated the evidence, experiences and institutional perspectives generated during the consultation into a shared understanding of Africa's opportunity crops agenda. Participants identified agricultural biodiversity, conservation, breeding, seed systems, competitive markets, supportive policies and sustained investment as interconnected priorities rather than separate areas of intervention.

The discussions reaffirmed that opportunity crops should no longer be treated as peripheral species. They are strategic resources for improving nutrition, strengthening climate resilience, diversifying food systems and supporting rural livelihoods. Participants also recognized that no country or institution can advance this agenda independently, making regional and continental cooperation essential.

Key Messages

- Conservation, breeding, seed systems, markets, policy and investment must be addressed as components of one integrated transformation agenda.
- Regional cooperation in research, germplasm exchange, policy harmonization, higher education and market development can maximize Africa's existing expertise and resources.
- Biodiversity conservation must be linked with innovation, entrepreneurship, markets and farmer adoption to generate practical benefits.
- Future efforts should move beyond awareness-building towards coordinated implementation and measurable results.
- Sustaining momentum will require mechanisms for continued dialogue, knowledge exchange, joint action and institutional accountability.

The consultation established broad agreement on the importance, challenges and strategic priorities of opportunity crops in Africa. The next phase must translate this shared understanding into coordinated action. Stronger continental collaboration, sustained investment and integrated implementation will be essential to convert opportunity crops from underutilized resources into drivers of food security, nutrition, climate resilience and economic opportunity.

Session 11: From Consultation to Coordination

Overview

The final technical session moved the consultation from dialogue to collaborative planning. Drawing on three days of learning, participants identified the systems, partnerships and investments required to mainstream opportunity crops within Africa's agrifood transformation agenda.

The working groups reached broad agreement on priorities spanning genetic-resource conservation, breeding, quality seed, value-chain development, enabling policies, higher

education, capacity strengthening and public–private investment. Participants advocated stronger coordination among existing programs, centers of excellence, research networks and regional organizations rather than creating additional structures.

The deliberations also laid the foundation for an Africa Roadmap and a continental community of practice capable of sustaining knowledge exchange, joint implementation and collective accountability.

Key Messages

- The Africa Roadmap should integrate conservation, breeding, seed systems, markets, education, policy, finance and institutional strengthening.
- Implementation should build on existing institutions, networks and initiatives while reducing fragmentation and duplication.
- A continental community of practice is needed to connect researchers, policymakers, universities, farmers, development partners and private enterprises.
- Long-term coordination mechanisms should support knowledge sharing, joint planning, implementation, periodic review and institutional accountability.
- Investments must be aligned across the innovation system and supported through effective public–private partnerships.
- Political commitment should be sustained by demonstrating the contribution of opportunity crops to food security, nutrition, climate resilience, biodiversity and economic development.

Africa possesses the scientific expertise, institutional capacity and shared commitment needed to advance opportunity crops. The immediate priority is to translate this foundation into a coordinated continental roadmap with clear actions, aligned investments and mechanisms for monitoring progress. The shared ownership established during the consultation provides a strong basis for transforming its recommendations into policies, programs and measurable results.

Spotlight II: Actionable Roadmap for Integrating Opportunity Crops into the Food Systems - From Shared Vision to Coordinated Action

The Regional Consultation affirmed that Africa possesses the crop diversity, scientific expertise and institutional foundations required to position opportunity crops as strategic contributors to food security, nutrition, climate resilience and economic development. Unlocking this potential, however, requires coordinated and sustained action across the entire innovation system.

The proposed roadmap is not a prescriptive implementation plan. It is a strategic framework that aligns the priorities emerging from the three-day consultation and identifies areas where national, regional and continental collaboration can deliver the greatest impact.

Strategic Priority 1: Conserve and Mobilize Plant Genetic Resources

Expand the collection, characterization, documentation and conservation of opportunity crops. Conserved materials should be accessible to researchers, breeders and farming communities for crop improvement and sustainable use, consistent with applicable access and benefit-sharing arrangements.

Strategic Priority 2: Accelerate Research and Crop Improvement

Strengthen multidisciplinary research, participatory breeding, genomics, phenotyping and digital innovation to develop productive, nutritious, climate-resilient and market-responsive varieties. Research priorities should reflect farmers' knowledge, consumer preferences and diverse agroecological conditions.

Strategic Priority 3: Build Inclusive and Resilient Seed Systems

Connect formal seed systems, community seed banks and farmer-managed networks to improve the multiplication, quality and availability of seed. Regulatory systems should support variety registration and certification while protecting crop diversity and farmers' choices.

Strategic Priority 4: Develop Competitive and Inclusive Value Chains

Invest in aggregation, processing, product development, quality assurance, certification, logistics, market intelligence, branding and consumer awareness. Strong business cases and inclusive commercial models should generate reliable returns for farmers, processors and other value-chain actors.

Strategic Priority 5: Mainstream Opportunity Crops in Policy and Investment

Integrate opportunity crops into agricultural, nutrition, biodiversity, climate-adaptation, education and trade strategies. Establish long-term financing mechanisms that combine public investment, development finance and responsible private-sector participation across the innovation continuum.

Strategic Priority 6: Strengthen Human and Institutional Capacity

Modernize university curricula, professional training and technical programs to develop the next generation of researchers, breeders, seed specialists, entrepreneurs and policymakers. Pay particular attention to youth, women, and locally rooted institutions.

Strategic Priority 7: Establish Coordinated Continental Implementation

Build on existing institutions, centers of excellence, research networks and regional platforms to reduce duplication and align investments. A continental community of practice should support knowledge exchange, joint programming, South–South cooperation and periodic review of progress.

The Way Forward

Implementation should be adapted to national contexts while remaining aligned with the continental vision. The immediate priorities are to define responsibilities, establish measurable targets, mobilize financing and develop mechanisms for coordination, monitoring and accountability.

Together, these actions provide a coherent pathway for moving opportunity crops from fragmented initiatives to a coordinated African agenda that transforms the continent's agricultural biodiversity into improved nutrition, resilient livelihoods, competitive enterprises, and sustainable agrifood systems.

Recommendations

The strategic priorities outlined in the roadmap define what must be achieved. The recommendations below clarify the distinct responsibilities of key stakeholder groups in translating those priorities into action. Implement them through coordinated programs with clear roles, timelines, financing, and measurable results.

Governments

- Designate a lead institution and establish an interministerial mechanism to coordinate the national opportunity crops agenda.
- Mainstream priority crops into agricultural investment plans, nutrition programs, climate-adaptation measures and public procurement systems.
- Provide predictable public financing and create incentives that stimulate research, enterprise development and private investment.
- Review policies and regulations that constrain variety registration, seed distribution, processing and trade.

Research Institutions

- Establish demand-led research programs that respond to farmers' needs, market opportunities and national development priorities.
- Characterize priority genetic resources and convert research findings into improved varieties, production technologies and accessible data.
- Work with farmers, universities and businesses to test, validate and scale innovations.
- Adopt shared research protocols and knowledge platforms to improve collaboration and reduce duplication.

Universities and Training Institutions

- Embed opportunity crops within relevant curricula across agriculture, nutrition, food science, business and environmental studies.
- Develop interdisciplinary postgraduate programs and practical training linked to industry and farming communities.
- Build the next generation of breeders, seed specialists, food technologists, entrepreneurs and policymakers.
- Support student-led research, enterprise incubation and innovation around opportunity crops.

Development and Financing Partners

- Replace fragmented, short-term projects with coordinated, multi-year programs aligned with national and continental priorities.
- Provide catalytic financing for high-risk areas such as conservation, breeding, capacity development and early-stage enterprise.

- Support regional learning, South–South cooperation and the scaling of proven approaches.
- Align reporting requirements and funding instruments to reduce institutional burden and improve collective impact.

Private Sector

- Develop commercially viable products and services in seed production, aggregation, processing, packaging and distribution.
- Invest in product innovation, quality assurance, branding and consumer development.
- Establish fair and reliable sourcing arrangements with farmers and producer organizations.
- Partner with research institutions to commercialize technologies and respond to changing market demand.

Farmer and Producer Organizations

- Define production, breeding and market priorities based on farmers' knowledge and local conditions.
- Strengthen community seed banks, farmer-managed seed networks and participatory variety evaluation.
- Organize aggregation, quality management and collective marketing to improve bargaining power and market access.
- Ensure that women, youth and marginalized producers participate in decision-making and benefit from emerging value chains.

Regional and Continental Organizations

- Develop common frameworks for germplasm exchange, seed regulation, quality standards and regional trade.
- Coordinate existing networks, centers of excellence and knowledge platforms around shared continental priorities.
- Mobilize and align cross-border investment while facilitating joint research and capacity-development programs.
- Establish a continental results framework to monitor implementation, document lessons and promote accountability.

Concluding Remarks

All stakeholder groups should work through existing institutions and platforms wherever possible. Implementation arrangements should specify leadership, responsibilities, timelines, financing and indicators to ensure that the recommendations produce measurable benefits for farmers, consumers and agrifood enterprises.

Annex 1. Consultation Agenda

Draft Agenda

Regional Consultation on Opportunity Crops in Africa

9 – 11 June 2026 | Accra, Ghana | Hybrid Event

Discussions were streamed live during the event. Interpretation will be available in English and French.

Time	Activity	Speaker
Opening and Welcome		
Chair: Wole Fatunbi, *FARA*		
09:00 – 09:30	Welcome remarks: • Assistant Deputy Director-General, FAO • Executive Director, FARA • Opening by *Deputy Minister of Food and Agriculture*	Abebe Haile-Gabriel, *FAO* Aggrey Agumya, *FARA* John Matthew Kofi Setor Dumelo,
09:30 - 10:30	• Unlocking Africa's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture • A transition framework for the integration of neglected and underutilized species (NUS) in agri-food systems • From policy to practice: scaling opportunity crops through coordinated action	Chikelu Mba *FAO* Hamid El Bilali, *CIHEAM-Bari* Clement Adjorlolo, *AUDA-NEPAD*
10:30 -11:00	*Coffee break*	
11:00 - 12:00	• Opportunity crops for the transition of African agrifood systems • Optimizing African ingredients and the cultural food value of opportunity crops • Progress in the Implementation of the Africa Manifesto on Opportunity Crops/ Forgotten Foods: Implementation Status Report	Julia Sibiya, *VACS* Madam Fatmata Binta, *Dineonamat* Wole Fatunbi, *FARA*
Theme 1: Overcoming barriers: innovative approaches for opportunity crops		
Chair: Wole Fatunbi, *FARA*		

12:00 - 13:00	• From science to policy: plant health solutions for opportunity crop (*Virtual*) • Creation of novel research development and networking in advancing agronomic practices • Mechanization pathways for opportunity crops in smallholder systems (*Virtual*)	Abdou Tenkouano, *ICIPE* Ousmane NDOYE, *CORAF* Joe Mzinga, *ESAFF*
13:00 -14:00	*Lunch Break*	
Theme 2: From knowledge to action: strengthening capacity and raising awareness for opportunity crops		
Chair: Mphumuzi Sukati, *FAO*		
14:00 - 15:30	• Scaling Nutrient-Rich Crops to Combat Hunger, Malnutrition, and Climate-Driven Food Insecurity in Africa • Awareness raising for recognizing the values of opportunity crops by all in society. • Local producers' capacity building in opportunity crops: integration and agroecology transition • Development of a specialized capacity instrument for NARES and relevant institutions towards the development of forgotten foods.	Maureen Duru, *The Food Bridge* Nelson Ojijo, *JKUAT* Olawunmi Benedict, *GROW West Africa* Vincent Aduramigba, IAR&T/OAU
15:30 -16:00	*Coffee Break*	
Theme 3: Progress of regional actions in Africa on the integration of opportunity crops into agrifood systems		
Chair: Mphumuzi Sukati, *FAO*		
16:00 - 17:00	• Communities of practice and the importance of regional networks • West and Central Africa States • Eastern and Central Africa states • Southern African States	Wole Fatunbi, *FARA* Ndèye Aïssatou Diop, *CORAF* Moses Odeke, *ASARECA* Batholomeu Chataika, *CCARDESA*
Chair: Wole Fatunbi, *FARA*		
17:00 – 18:00	*Poster Pitch* 	11 supported Early Career Researcher /Academia

Time	Activity	Speaker
Theme 4: On-Farm Diversity and Local Adaptation in Opportunity Crops		

Chair: Arshiya Noorani, *FAO*		
09:30 – 10:30	• Managing the diversity of opportunity crops on farm in Africa • Harnessing the diversity of opportunity crops for resilience • Development of locally adapted opportunity crops' varieties through participatory plant breeding	Carlo Fadda, *Alliance of Bioversity & CIAT* Olakunle Sansa, *IITA* Hillary Mugiyo, Ministry of Agriculture, Zimbabwe
10:30 – 11:00	*Coffee Break*	
Theme 5: Securing the diversity of opportunity crops in situ and ex situ programmes		
Chair: Arshiya Noorani, *FAO*		
11:00 – 13:00	• Complementary conservation strategies • Role of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in the conservation and sustainable use of opportunity crops (*Virtual*) • Strengthening collaborative plant breeding efforts to improve the adaptation and nutritional quality of forgotten foods (Virtual) • Complementarity of on-farm management and ex situ conservation • Promote the collection and conservation of genetic resources of forgotten foods for germplasm exchange.	Nora Castaneda, *Crop Trust* Alvaro Toledo, *ITPGRFA* Enoch G. Achigan-Dako, *UAC-Benin AOCC/AfPBA* Olaniyi Oyatomi, *IITA* Mathilda Bissah, *PGRI-CSIR*
13:00 – 14:30	*Lunch Break & Poster Sessions*	
Theme 6: Pre-breeding and breeding opportunity crops for nutrition and resilient agrifood systems		
Chair: Chikelu Mba, *FAO*		
14:30 – 15:30	• Introduction of knowledge on opportunity crops into teaching modules in educational programs • Grass pea – An opportunity crop for climate-resilient agriculture in Africa and Asia • Strengthening plant breeding capacity for opportunity crops in Africa (*Virtual*)	Francois Stepman, *GFAiR* Shiv Kumar Agarwal, *ICARDA* Rita Mumm, *AOCC*
Theme 7: Improving seed systems: practical pathways for value chain development		
Chair: Chike Mba, *FAO*		
14:30 – 15:30	• Development of sustainable seed systems that will enhance accessibility, availability, and affordability of high-quality seeds of forgotten foods. • Registration of local varieties of opportunity crops: an integrated approach (*Virtual*) • Lessons learnt in strengthening value chains: experiences from FAO's One Country One Product initiative	Presidor Kendabie, NDU-Nigeria Yarama Dakwa Ndirpaya, *AATF* Edward Kilawe, *FAO*

15:30 – 16:00	*Coffee Break & Poster Sessions*	
Theme 8: Growing impact and building markets: the business case for opportunity crops		
Chair: Clement Adjorlolo, *AUDA-NEPAD*		
16:00 – 17:30	• From forgotten to formal: integrating orphan crops into Africa's seed trade systems • From innovation to impact: Bayer's role in opportunity crops • Facilitation of better access to markets, support to short supply chains, and alternative retail structures	Yacouba Diallo, *AFSTA* Stefano Marras, *Bayer* Andrew Egala, *GWB Kenya*

Time	Activity	Speaker
	Theme 9: Development of the action-based roadmap: the way forward on opportunity crops integration in Africa	
Chair: Wole Fatumbi, *FARA*		
09:00 – 10:30	*Working Groups* (Participants divided into 3 groups) Agenda Setting / Roadmap for delivery	Breakout sessions
10:30 - 11:00	*Coffee Break*	
10:30 – 12:00	*Plenary: Working Group Reports & Discussions*	
12:00– 12:30	Summary of discussions and charting the way forward	Chikelu Mba, *FAO*
12:00 – 13:00	Closing remarks: • Executive Director, FARA • FAO Representative in Ghana (ad interim), FAO	Aggrey Agumya, FARA Priya Gujadhur, *FAO*
13:00 – 14:00	*Closing Lunch*	
FIELD VISIT **Food Research Institute of Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Ghana**		

Annex 2. List of Participants

Sr/n	Name	Organization	Country
1	Francoise Stepman	GFAiR / RUFORUM	Belgium
2	Maureen Duru	The Food Bridge	Belgium
3	Affonfere Marius	National University of Agriculture, Benin	Benin
4	Enoch G. Achigan-Dako	Genetics, Biotechnology and Seed Science Center. Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, University of Abomey-Calavi	Benin
5	Bartholomew Chatiaka	CCARDESA	Botswana
6	DAN MOTLHANKA	Botswana College of Agriculture	Botswana
7	Ethelyn E. Forchibe	Catholic University of Cameroon	Cameroon
8	Nora Castaneda	Crop Trust	Germany
9	Merline Mensah	FARA	Ghana
10	Olawunmi Benedict	Grow West Africa	Ghana
11	Edward Kilawe	FAO	Ghana
12	Bissah Matilda	CSIR-PGRI	Ghana
13	Priya Gujadhur	FAO	Ghana
14	Johnson Ukpong	FARA	Ghana
15	Francis Kpodo	FARA	Ghana
16	Patrick Kofi Maule	FARA	Ghana
17	Aggrey Agumya	FARA	Ghana
18	Oluwole A FATUNBI	FARA	Ghana
19	Shaquille Pennaneach	FARA	Ghana
20	Comfort Owusu	University of Ghana	Ghana
21	Samuel Lamptey	University of Ghana	Ghana
22	Kofi Aquaye	YPARD Africa Coordinator	Ghana
23	Mr. Richard Kombat	FARA	Ghana
24	Madam Fatmata Bintqa	Dine on a mat Kitchen	Ghana
25	Gloria L. Essilfie	University of Ghana	Ghana
26	Prof Elbilali	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation	Ghana
27	Rose Omari	CSIR-STEPPRI	Ghana
28	Charles Tortoe	CSIR-FRI	Ghana
29	Sukati, Mphumuzi	FAO	Ghana
30	Arshiya Noorani	FAO	India
31	Filippo ACASTO	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation	Italy
32	Nelson Ojijo	JAKUAT	Kenya

Sr/n	Name	Organization	Country
33	Andrew Egala	Green Without Borders	Kenya
34	Yacouba Diallo	African Seed Trade Association [AFSTA]	kenya
35	Fadda Carlo	Alliance of Bioversity and CIAT	Kenya
36	Rita Mumm	African Orphan Crops Consortium [AOCC]	Kenya
37	George N Chidimbah Munthali	ACENUB, Mzuzu University	Malawi
38	Olaniyi Oyatomi	IITA	Nigeria
39	Sansa Olakunle	IITA	Nigeria
40	Mary Omoboluwape Diekade	VACS Fellow, IITA/ University of Ibadan	Nigeria
41	Oloyede Funmilayo	Osun State University	Nigeria
42	Uchi Dominic	Ocean Prediction Decade Collaborative Center (DCC),	Nigeria
43	Segun Eyitayo	Gamaal	Nigeria
44	Vincent Aduramigba	IAR&T / IITA	Nigeria
45	Yarama Ndirpaya	AATF	Nigeria
46	Tunde Ajayi	consultant	Nigeria
47	Oladeji Olashinde	Advanced Local Leadership, Innovation and Networks (ALL-IN)	Nigerian
48	Chikelu Mba	FAO	Rome
49	Kent Nnadozie	International Plant Treaty / FAO	Rome
50	Boroto Ruhiza	FAO Rome	Rome
51	Ndèye Aïssatou DIOP	CORAF	Senegal
52	Ousmane NDOYE	CORAF	Senegal
53	Clement Adjorlolo	AUDA-NEPAD	South Africa
54	Julia Sibiya	University of KwaZulu-Natal	South Africa
55	Moses Odeke	ASARECA	Uganda
56	Joshua Mzinga	Regional Coordinator Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers Forum	Uganda
57	Alinaitwe Ochan	National Semi-Arid Resources Research Institute (NaSARRI) - Uganda	Uganda
58	Presidor Kendabie	Niger Delta State University / Virginia State University	USA
59	Hillary Mugiyo	Ministry of Agriculture, Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe

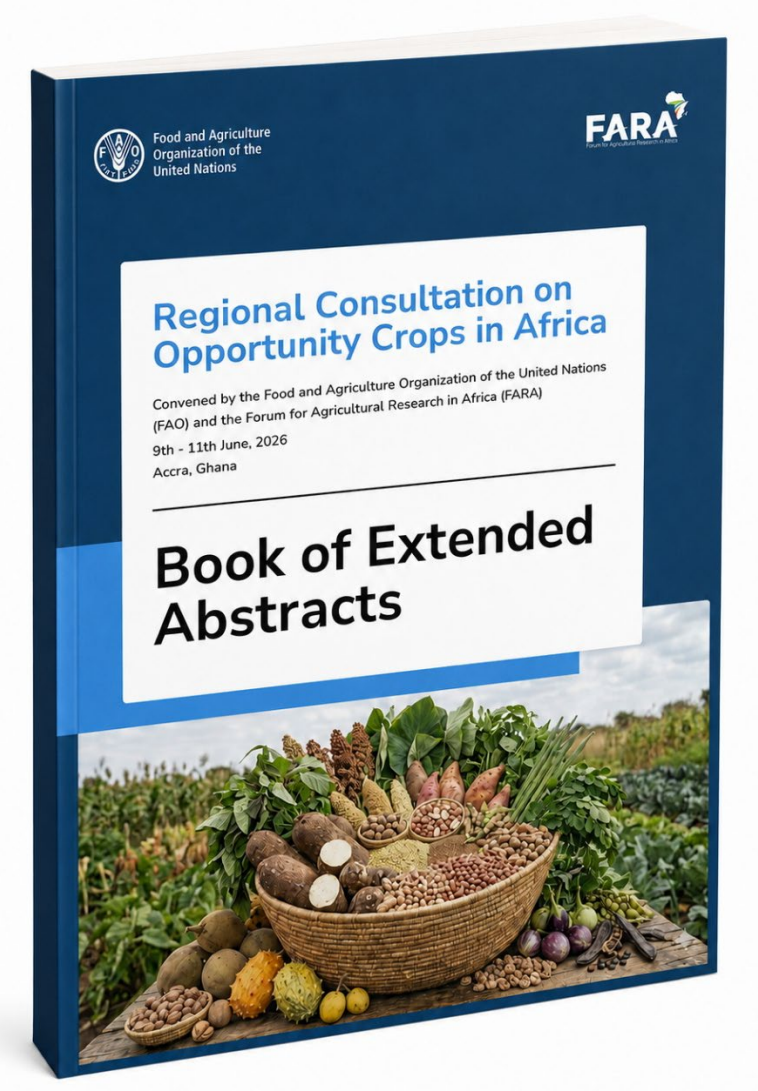
Annex 3. List of all organizations that attended

No.	Acronym	Full official name
1	GFAiR	Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation
2	NDU / VSU	Niger Delta University, Nigeria / Virginia State University, United States
3	AATF	African Agricultural Technology Foundation
4	ACENUB–MZUNI	African Centre of Excellence in Neglected and Underutilised Biodiversity, Mzuzu University, Malawi
5	ALL-IN	Advancing Local Leadership, Innovation and Networks
6	AOCC	African Orphan Crops Consortium
7	AfSTA	African Seed Trade Association
8	Alliance	Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture
9	ASARECA	Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
10	AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency–New Partnership for Africa's Development
11	BUAN	Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, formerly Botswana College of Agriculture
12	CATUC	Catholic University of Cameroon, Bamenda
13	CCARDESA	Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa
14	Consultant	Independent consultant — name or institutional affiliation should be specified
15	CORAF	West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development
16	Crop Trust	Global Crop Diversity Trust
17	CSIR-FRI	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research–Food Research Institute, Ghana
18	CSIR-PGRRI	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research–Plant Genetic Resources Research Institute, Ghana
19	CSIR-STEPRI	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research–Science and Technology Policy Research Institute, Ghana
20	Dine on a Mat Kitchen	Dine on a Mat Kitchen
21	FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
22	FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
23	Gamaal	Gamaal — full registered name requires confirmation
24	GBSS–UAC	Genetics, Biotechnology and Seed Science Centre, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin
25	Green Without Borders	Green Without Borders
26	Grow West Africa	Grow West Africa
27	IAR&T	Institute of Agricultural Research and Training, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria
28	IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture

No.	Acronym	Full official name
29	Plant Treaty / FAO	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, administered by FAO
30	AICS	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
31	JKUAT	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya
32	MoLAFWR	Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, Zimbabwe
33	NaSARRI	National Semi-Arid Resources Research Institute, National Agricultural Research Organization, Uganda
34	UNA	National University of Agriculture, Benin
35	OPDCC	Ocean Prediction Decade Collaborative Center
36	UNIOSUN	Osun State University, Nigeria
37	ESAFF	Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers' Forum
38	The Food Bridge	The Food Bridge
39	UG	University of Ghana
40	UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
41	UI	University of Ibadan, Nigeria
42	YPARD Africa	Young Professionals for Agricultural Development–Africa

Annex 4. Conference Book of Extended Abstracts

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Annex 5. Random Photos

















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