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Frontload Water Justice in the CAADP Third Decade (2026-2035)

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Abstract

The Kampala Declaration set African commitments to improve agricultural productivity and contribute to economic growth for the next ten years. The emphasis is on channeling investment to smart and resilient practices; yet, this approach commodifies water because of inadequate financing mechanisms, water grabbing and contested transboundary water infrastructures. The Declaration will be enacted in 2026; thus, there is a chance to promote water justice and foster agricultural transformation during South Africa's G20 presidency in 2025. This policy note provides recommendations for adopting frugal technology, adjustable water infrastructures and empowering water users' and farmers' associations financially as well as in policy making and assessment processes.



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Introduction

The Kampala Declaration was released during the African Union (AU) extraordinary summit held in Uganda from 9 to 11 January 2025. The declaration aims to 'build resilient and sustainable agri-food systems'. This is the third Declaration, following the Maputo Declaration (2003-2013) and the Malabo Declaration (2014-2025). The objectives of these declarations have not altered; rather, each one renews similar objectives which are: transform the agriculture sector in order to end hunger and increase its contribution to the economy. To attain these objectives, the declarations endorse African countries to allocate 10% of their national budgets to increase agriculture growth rate by 6% annually; yet, performance in the agriculture sector has not reached the set continental target.

The Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) strategy for the third decade (2026-2035) comes at a challenging time, with severe environmental changes persistent inequality in market and trading regimes at local, national and continental scales. The CAADP strategy and action plan (2026-2035) highlights 'sustainable water management' among other crucial factors affecting transformation of agri-food systems[1]. Therefore, water management is an integral component of interventions designed in accordance with the CAADP strategy. However, since increased investment and advanced technology for efficient water use prioritize commercial and profit-driven interests over its status as a public good and human right, the CAADP's approach commodifies water.

The inception of the third decade strategy (2026-2035) coincides with South Africa's G20 presidency. South Africa articulates comparable objectives to those of the CAADP on the agriculture aspect. They include advancing investment and technology, promoting inclusive economic policies, engaging young people and women in the agriculture transformation and adopting policies and financial mechanisms that are compatible with climate change and resilience[2]. Water management does not have a specific working group at the G20; instead, it is integrated across sherpa tracks. Nevertheless, framing water management in terms of investment and technology purposes put equality and sustainability values at risk.

Accordingly, this policy brief aims to emphasize the importance of articulating water as a public good while transforming agri-food systems in the continent. The policy brief starts by explaining the changes throughout the three CAADP Declarations, followed by how water is articulated, the three major challenges in water management and the recommendations to attain water justice

From irrigated agriculture in Maputo to smart agriculture in Kampala

The Maputo Declaration (2003-2014) was the first continental commitment to consolidate the contribution of

[1] African Union, CAADP and AUDA-NEPAD. (September 15, 2024). Draft CAADP Strategy and Action Plan: 2026-2035 (Building Resilient Agri-Food Systems in Africa). Retrieved from: [efaidnbmnnnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/44344-doc3._EN_CAADP_Strategy_and_Action_Plan_-_2026-2035_September_15_2024_Final.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/44344-doc3._EN_CAADP_Strategy_and_Action_Plan_-_2026-2035_September_15_2024_Final.pdf)

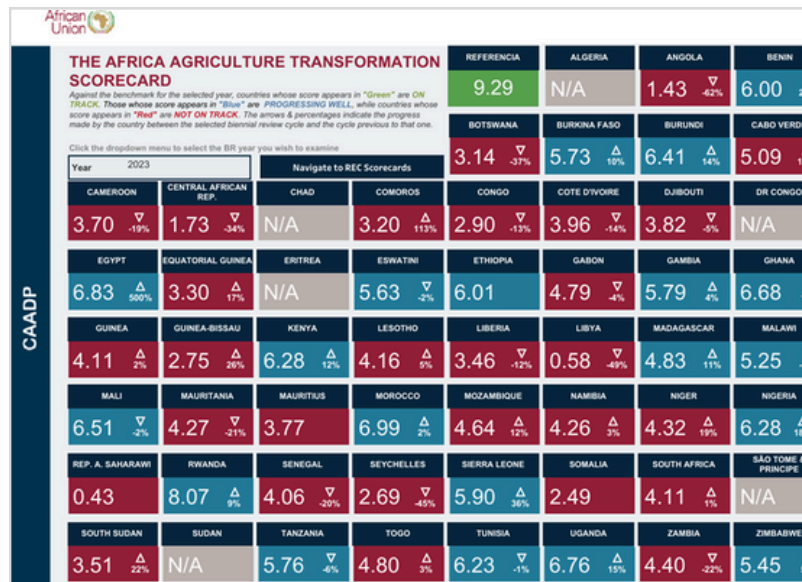
[2] G20 South Africa. (2024). Agriculture. Retrieved from <https://g20.org/track/agriculture/>

agriculture sector in economic development while improving livelihoods in rural areas. Accordingly, the CAADP was enacted in 2003. During the first ten years, the strategy was formulated to attain four broad objectives: 1) improving agriculture inputs by enhancing fertility and irrigation, 2) expanding infrastructure to facilitate crop transportation, storage and trading, 3) supporting small farmers by enhancing their farming capabilities and eliminating hunger through responsive humanitarian interventions, and 4) enhancing the role of science, information and technology in agriculture planning and investment[3].

These objectives were reaffirmed and elaborated in the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods. African governments set seven commitments for the second ten years (2014-2025), which include: 1) affirming the role of agriculture in economic growth by considering inclusive and evidence-based policies, 2) encouraging and developing investment-based growth strategies and policies, 3) increase agricultural productivity to end hunger and malnutrition in 2025, 4) enhancing the role of agriculture in reducing poverty, specifically through generating jobs and private sector involvement, 5) improving continental infrastructure and easing trading and tariffs policies, 6) strengthening policies and investment on climate change adaptation and resilience; and 7) creating ‘Agricultural Review Process’ every two years to ensure accountability[4].

African countries appear to have made little progress during the past 20 years. The CAADP monitoring system shows that in 2023, the majority of countries have not met the set goals and have not received a green scorecard, as illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Performance of African Countries According to Malabo’s Objectives



Source: African Union. (2023). CAADP Toolkit. Retrieved from: <https://au.int/caadp/toolkit>

[3] New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). (July 2003). Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme. Retrieved from: [https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.resakss.org/sites/default/files/AU%20NEPAD%202003%20Comprehensive%20Africa%20Agriculture%20Development%20Programme%20\(CAADP\).pdf](https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.resakss.org/sites/default/files/AU%20NEPAD%202003%20Comprehensive%20Africa%20Agriculture%20Development%20Programme%20(CAADP).pdf)

[4] African Union Commission. (2014). Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods. Retrieved from: <https://www.nepad.org/caadp/publication/malabo-declaration-accelerated-agricultural-growth>

The lead African strategy for the next ten years is framed in the Kampala CAADP Declaration on Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems in Africa, which divides the 5th goal of the first aspiration in Agenda 2063 'modern agriculture for increased productivity and production' into six pillars: 1) advancing the agrifood system by enhancing industrialization and continental trade, 2) encouraging investment in all value chain of agriproduction, 3) combatting hunger by eliminating malnutrition, 4) reducing poverty by improving resilient capabilities, generating green jobs and expanding social policies, 5) strengthening resilience to climate fluctuations, and 6) consolidating CAADP accountability tools[5].

There has been a significant rearticulation of the goal of agriculture productivity in Kampala to put in relation to severe climatic change and environmental shocks, as well as the reality of African economies that face a variety of challenges such as a lack of appropriate agriculture, trade and financial policies, incompetent infrastructure and technology to manage severe environmental impacts. That is why, the Kampala Declaration asserts on increasing agriculture productivity through adopting advanced, innovative technology with financial policies for increasing investment.

Water Investment in the CAADP

The continent is rich in water resources (rains, surface and ground waters); however, they are vulnerable to climatic fluctuations, contamination as well as inadequate distribution. This makes water resources unreliable for a consistent growth in the agriculture sector as envisioned by CAADP. Thus, in the first years, the emphasis in Maputo Declaration was to channel investment to extend irrigated lands and provide maintenance for existing irrigation infrastructure to increase irrigated arable lands from 12.6 million hectare to 20 million hectare in 2015. The emphasis on irrigation was combined with limited interest in advancing rain-fed agriculture; rather, rain harvesting was allocated for humanitarian purposes. Furthermore, the Maputo Declaration highlighted the importance of combining transformation to irrigation with complimentary policies to ensure the poor have access to transformed lands. Regarding investment, the deceleration asserted on the role of public funds in leading transformation policies while encouraging private capital.

Comparably, water/irrigation has little emphasis in the Malabo Declaration since it is framed under the third commitment of ending hunger and is one among other sub-objectives. It is stated as 'efficient and effective water management systems notably through irrigation'. Actually, the Malabo Declaration focuses on operating and governing the commitments that articulated in 2003.

The recent Kampala Declaration articulates water as a scare resource that is at risk due to environmental sever changes. Therefore, there is a clear assertion on water efficiency in farming practices, encouraging water circulation, rain harvesting and channeling investment toward advanced water technologies.

[5]African Union Commission. (2025). Kampala CAADP Declaration on Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems In Africa. Retrieved from https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://rr-africa.woah.org/app/uploads/2025/01/REV_ENGLISH-Draft-Kampala-CAADP-Declaration-January-10-2025-FT-C.pdf

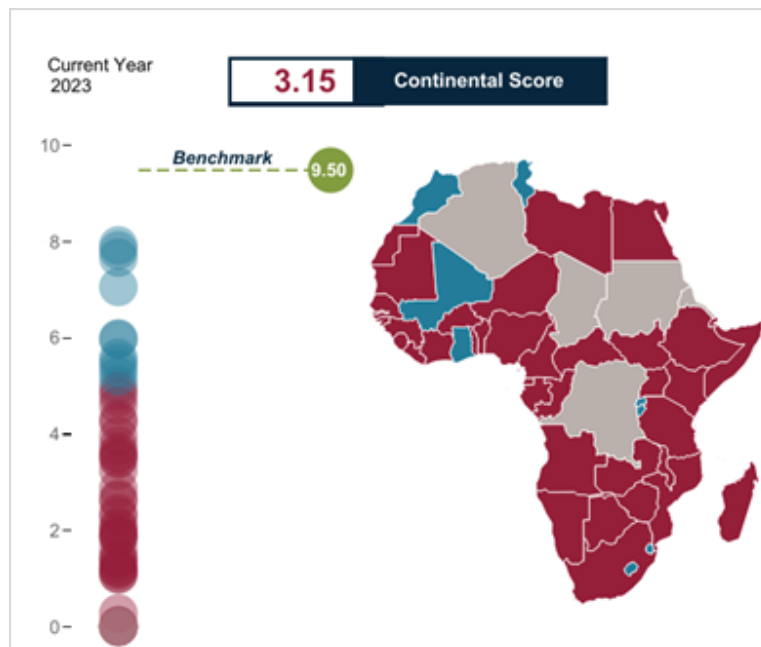
At continental level, investment is the financial model to attain CAADP’s objectives. The Continental Africa Water Investment Program (AIP) and the International High Level Panel on Water Investments for Africa were formulated to mobilize public and private investment to water sector and to advocate for policies that facilitate proliferating of financial/banking services in water-related aspects. Yet, this continental approach commodifies water which deter aspired justice.

Challenges of Water Justices

There are three pressing areas of injustice that counter progress in CAADP. They are:

1. Poor financial mechanisms: integrating technology (i.e. solar-based irrigation) and innovative tools (i.e. mobile applications) are effective at large-scale agriculture more than at small- scale farming. The CAADP monitor demonstrates that African countries are far away from reaching their commitment of mobilizing investment in agriculture (figure 2). Different factors contribute to this widespread poor performance, including: the lack of access to financial services, inefficient credit institutions and regulations, excessive interest rates and market rules/arrangements limit the growth of small farmers. Globally, the UN’s different funds for climate mitigation and adaptation reveal a significant gap between pledges announced by developed countries and allocated amounts. As a result, the Continental Africa Water Investment Program (AIP) and the International High Level Panel on Water Investments for Africa have some challenges in mobilizing the necessary funding for agriculture transformation.

Figure 2: Performance regarding investment in agriculture

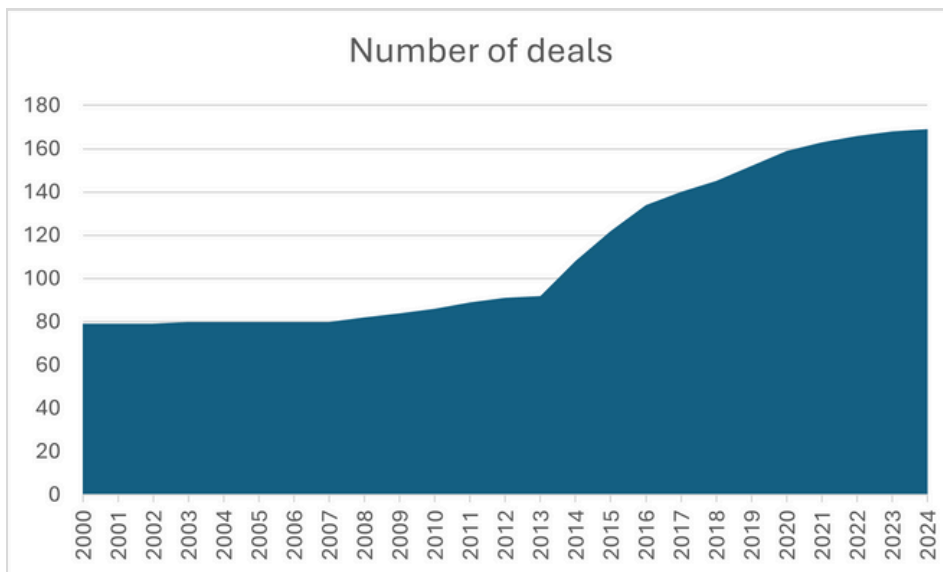


Source: African Union. (2023). CAADP toolkit. Retrieved from <https://au.int/caadp/toolkit>

[5]African Union Commission. (2025). Kampala CAADP Declaration on Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems In Africa. Retrieved from https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://rr-africa.woah.org/app/uploads/2025/01/REV_ENGLISH-Draft-Kampala-CAADP-Declaration-January-10-2025-FT-C.pdf

2. Land acquisition embeds water grabbing: increasing agricultural productivity for national economic growth and food security entails the expansion of land acquisition. Due to small farmers' limited capacity to obtain funding and utilize advanced technology, big investors have taken control of the agriculture sector. Leasing lands to investors embeds redistributing water in favour of large-scale irrigated lands. Additionally, cultivating water intensive crops for export contributes to increased water stress at national level. In 2023, there were more than 28 million hectares allocated for large-scale land acquisitions in Africa. Figure 3 depicts the constant increase in land acquisition by big investors.

Figure 3: Number of acquisition deals since 2000 in Africa



Source: Land matrix. (n.d.). 'Africa'. Retrieved from: <https://landmatrix.org/country-profile/concluded-deals-over-time/>

3. Contested transboundary water infrastructure: the continent has 63 shared rivers and lakes, which necessitate a commitment to cooperative governance. Yet, the assertion that expanding water infrastructure for increasing irrigated lands include detrimental consequences for local communities as well as water distribution across riparian countries. Constructing of large hydropower dams or inter-basin transfers cause displacement of rural communities and abandoning their agricultural activities, which in turn increase their vulnerability. Furthermore, the AU lacks bidding rules that ensure justice in the distribution of shared water among riparian countries, particularly, in presence of large water infrastructure.

Recommendations

To mitigate the challenges since the inception of CAADP, and to effectively implement Kampala Declaration for the next ten years, water justice needs to be the frontload of the CAADP strategy. The AU and South Africa are the continent's only two permanent members in the G20. The AU thoroughly coordinates priorities with South Africa which align with Agenda 2063. Accordingly, there is a current opportunity under South Africa's presidency of G20 and the membership of the AU to strengthen water justice while attaining agriculture transformation. Thus, this policy note suggests the following recommendations:

1. South Africa and the AU should promote frugal technology and innovation in water management due to its low cost and ability to preserve indigenous practices without deteriorating environment.
2. South Africa and the AU should reinstate the Maputo vision of leading public expenditure in constructing and rehabilitating water infrastructures.
3. Water users' associations and other forms of community associations-unlike established private entities-need constant financial support; thus, African governments should provide financial incentives including debt cancelation for small farmers.
4. The CAADP and South Africa's G20 presidency consider inclusivity and multistakeholder processes; however, investors and private corporations wield more power than small farmers. Thus, South Africa and the AU should establish a particular consultation mechanism with water users' and farmers' associations to ensure their engagement in the continental agriculture policy and assessment processes.
5. Private funding for water infrastructure can omit negative social consequences in favor of achieving higher productivity. Thus, South Africa should contend that investors from other G20 countries adhere to the findings of social and environmental assessments on national and transnational planned water infrastructures.
6. Investing on hydropower is a global vision to expand renewable energy, but large dams' constructions have drastic environmental and social impacts; thus, South Africa and the AU should guide public and private investors to build adjustable transboundary water infrastructure that does not endanger communities or the environment.